RETRO GAMER

OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

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RETROINSPECTION

ATARI 7800

WHY ATARI'S 8-BIT CONSOLE FAILED TO LIVE UP TO EXPECTATIONS





Celebrating the adventures of everyone's favourite silicon chick

LOVING LARA

EXCLUSIVE

CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

WE SPEAK TO THE DEVELOPER ABOUT LARA CROFT AND THE GUARDIAN OF LIGHT

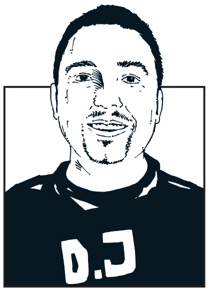
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE TOMB RAIDER GAME?



DARRAN JONES

I really enjoyed *Legend*. It was a refreshing reboot and Lara was more athletic than ever.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two lovely girls and **Retro Gamer**
Currently playing:
Super Mario Galaxy 2
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

Though I really loved the sequel, the original *Tomb Raider* gets my vote. It raised the benchmark for the action game genre, and I don't think any game since has been able to mirror its impact.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Alan Wake
Favourite game of all time:
Alan Wake



JASON KELK

The one I enjoyed the most was the handheld iteration of *Tomb Raider: Legend*. Sadly I was absolutely terrible at it!
Expertise:
8-bit computers
Currently playing:
Uridium 2 (Amiga)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

The one where whatever idiot is following Lara around with a camera actually learns to point it in the right bloody direction. What do you mean "that doesn't exist"?
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Strategery
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



DAVID CROOKES

Easily the debut. With the shiny new PlayStation under the television it felt like the future. And so a love affair began…
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Alan Wake
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



PAUL DRURY

The first *Tomb Raider* on the PlayStation. Ah, the days when crate shoving and animal extermination seemed so fresh…
Expertise:
Fairchild Channel F
Currently playing:
Alan Wake
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



PAUL DAVIES

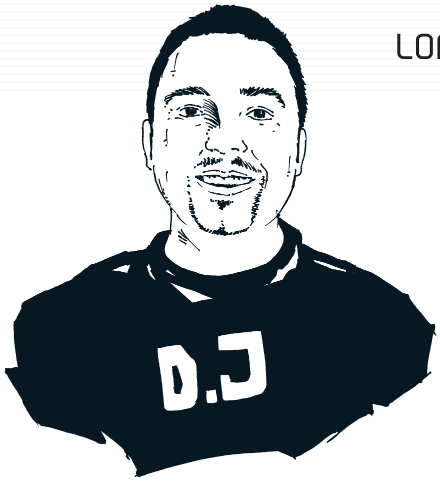
Easily the one with the wetsuit. I think that was *Tomb Raider III*.
Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Monster Hunter Tri
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



IAIN LEE

My favourite *Tomb Raider* is easily the first one. I remember seeing it at some games fair and it was revolutionary.
Expertise: Pretending to be an American on Xbox Live
Currently playing:
Far too much of *Red Dead Redemption*
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (BBC B)

LOADING...



Someone mentioned on a forum recently that Retro Gamer felt more corporate these days because we were once again covering *Tomb Raider* to tie in with the release of a new game. It's certainly a reasonable point until you realise that the last time we featured an article about *Tomb Raider* was over four years ago.

And that's one of the main things I love about working on **Retro Gamer**: there's still so much ground to cover. Yes, we've looked at certain franchises more than once, but ALWAYS from a fresh angle. This month's cover feature is no different, and rather than simply looking at the games of Lara, we're taking a look at Lara herself. Add in the fact that we're nearly 80 issues in and we still haven't done a definitive piece on Mario – don't worry; it's definitely coming – and it just goes to show how much more there is left to talk about.

People always ask me when we're going to start running out of ideas and throw in the towel. I simply smile at them and remark that we're just getting warmed up. Hopefully, you feel the same way.

Enjoy the magazine,





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>> Load 78 Breathing new life into classic games

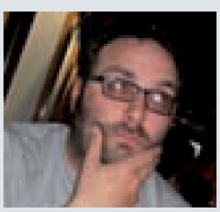


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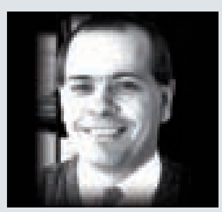
RETRO REVIVALS



In the hot seat this month…

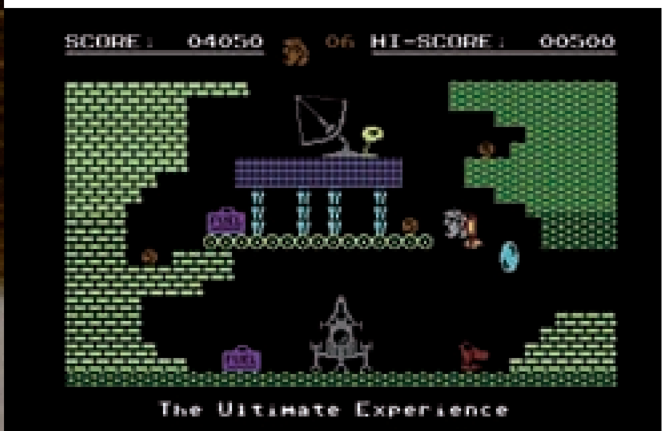




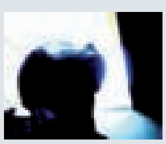


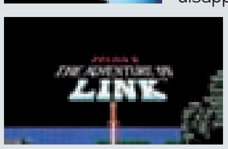
"The quest is possible rather than overwhelming"

Craig Grannell



RETRO GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

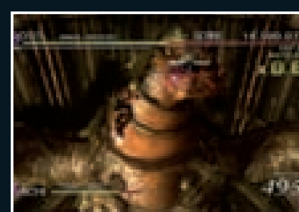


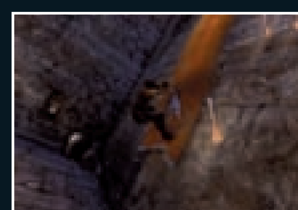




ESSENTIALS

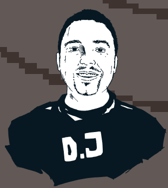
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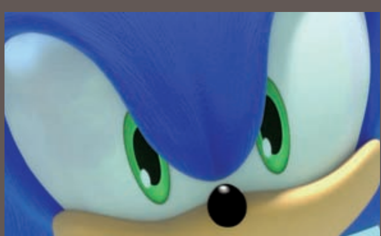
retro radar

» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



» There's a real sense of déjà vu this month thanks to a brand new Sonic game and two more game events, Retro Rewind and the incoming R3Play. Add in our usual columnists and fans of old-school gaming have never had it so good.

* CONTENTS



» Big-screen *Street Fighter IV* packs a punch.



» Tony Crowther teaches his boy how to play *Phoenix*.





» The kids love Blip – and who can blame them?



RETRO REWIND

PAUL DRURY GETS THE FULL MONTY AT SHEFFIELD EVENT

We've never had it so good. Over the past few years, the retro community has gathered at Retro Reunited, Byte Back, The Retro Ball, regular Retro Computer Museum open days and the perennially popular RetroVision to play, drink and natter. The latest addition to this variety of pixel-based party events is Retro Rewind, held at Sheffield Hallam Student Union this Easter.

"I was inspired by people that have done retro shows before," explains Retro Rewind organiser Shaun Scott, while trying to tune in his 57th telly of the day. "People like Lofarius, Witchfinder, Boyo, SirClive… I've had great support from the Retro Gamer forums. I'm doing it for my nephew who has leukaemia. He was diagnosed a few years ago and he's doing well. This is a good way of combining something I love with raising money for charity."

A worthy cause and also a wonderful venue. Spread across three large dome-shaped spaces, the event boasted a main games room, dominated by a huge projector screen and an outer circle of computers, consoles and arcade cabinets. Wander next door and you'd find yourself amid a retro market, where we spotted such rarities as a Japanese Famicom Disk Drive system and a Fairchild Channel F for sale. If the shopping and shoot-'em-ups got too much for you, there was always the chill-out area, which housed our favourite oddity of the day, a TI99/4a with the voice-recognising, speech-synthesising and ultra-rare MBX Expansion System. And of course, the long, student-priced bar acted as a hub for chatting and supping all weekend.

> "I've been walking around saying, I used to have one of those!"
>
> TONY CROWTHER GETS ALL NOSTALGIC AT RETRO REWIND



GO DEEPER

>> The event raised £1,611 for leukaemia charity Imagine www.imagineappeal.com

>> Over 100 machines were available to play, including the intimidating *Steel Battalion* setup

>> The shoot-'em-up competition was won by TwoHeadedBoy, who triumphed on *Mushihime-sama Futari* in the final

"These retro things are really bloody great," beams markopoloman over his beer, summing up the general mood. "Making new friends and meeting old ones. We're not just retro geeks on a forum, we're retro geeks in person!"

Among the many familiar faces were some famous ones, too. Archer Maclean happily kicked ass on *IK+* and told us about his ideas for *Mercury* follow-up Elements, while local lad Tony Crowther brought his son James along to show him what his dad did when he was his age. "I've been walking around saying, I used to have one of those!" smiles Tony. "I can understand the nostalgia. I'm really interested in the old hardware and that Virtual Boy… I'd never seen one before." We wonder what Crowther Junior makes of middle-aged men girlishly asking for his old man's autograph? "I knew he were a bit famous but not this much," he answers, before returning to *Snake* on the MSX.

Archer and Tony were soon reminiscing about the *Zzap!* Superstar Challenge and raiding Matthew Smith's minibar, so RG slipped away for a spin on *Warlords* for the Atari VCS, one of the many games singled out for competitive play. After much tactical grudge-bearing and sticky-balled shenanigans, the crown was taken by BoggyB, a new convert to this superlative multiplayer title.

Elsewhere, the beat-'em-up tournament, which culminated in a spectacular big screen slugfest on *Street Fighter IV*, was won by the eloquent and fast-fingered Dennoman, who instantly became retro gaming's most famous Belgian. He returned to his homeland with a golden joystick, specially sprayed for the show.

It was one of many sweet touches that gave the event real character. A selection of handheld games were scattered through the venue, allowing attendees to don a Tomytronic headset and go 3D the old-school way. There was the best lucky dip ever (for a quid we pulled out *Viewtiful Joe*, which never happens at our school fete) and free fingers of Fudge on the bar for that Eighties sugar rush. Plus, we even found something new among the retro treasures: *Ghost Castle* for the Spectrum.

"We've done it especially for the show," explains the leather-trousered Binman. "CodenameV coded it and I did the graphics. Back in the day, I did the graphics for *Turbo The Tortoise* and *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy*. I've been pissing about for years on the Speccy!"

We leave but not before sampling the atmospheric puzzling of *Ghost Castle*, which you can download for free from **www.worldofspectrum.org**. It was just one highlight of an event that deserves to become part of the retro calendar.

"It's like an extension of the community we have on the **Retro Gamer** forums," enthuses Scott. "It's great to put faces to avatar names and it means a lot more when you get back on the forums later.

"I've been most pleased just seeing groups of people talking and having a laugh. It'll be an annual event if people want it!"

Here's hoping and with much talk over the weekend about the forthcoming R3Play Blackpool shindig in November, the future for retro has seldom looked brighter.

Thanks to Guy and Shaun for the photos. ✱

From the Show

>> The Rewind crowd says Bo Selecta



Archer Maclean

It's fun to be here and see some familiar faces, like bumping into Tony Crowther after all these years. And I want to play *Doom* on that massive screen! That's got to be 25 foot – the pixels will be huge. I'm always amazed that here we are in 2010 celebrating all this stuff that happened in the Eighties. It is nice when people turn up to the show with one of your games and ask you to sign it. I had to sign someone physically once when we were promoting *Jimmy White's Snooker*. She was a bit of a groupie and lifted her top, so I did one and Jimmy did the other. I had to steady it first…



Witchfinder

This venue is excellent, really space age-y, and these big screens are cool. Plus there's like a retro market with loads of people selling stuff and a nice long bar! Events like this are more about the gamers than the games; though I am disappointed the five-a-side footie tournament has been postponed due to lack of able-bodied retro gamers. I'm thinking they shy away from fresh air and exercise. I'm part of the CGEU and we are hosting a really big gaming event in November, not just retro but lots of old stuff there. The venue is actually a castle. No shit! Though I think our princess will be in another castle…



Keith Ainsworth

Back in 1995 I started up **Retro Gamer** fanzine. Not many people back then were thinking about retro videogames. I'm pleased and surprised that the community has grown so much. I thought it would just be people who grew up with Spectrums and Ataris getting back into their old stuff, but each new generation has the games they look back to. Retro to them is PlayStation and Dreamcast, so it keeps moving on. I'm here flogging stuff and I like the mixture of games to play and to buy at the show. And I also like the fact that Tony Crowther and Archer Maclean have turned up.

THE RETRO DEBATE

>> Which multiplayer game would you want at a retro event?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

psj3809
Mario Kart would be a great choice. Strangely enough, the place seemed very quiet without *Rock Band*, which I normally cant stand, but I must admit I missed hearing some tunes.

lanky316
Sadly never been to one so can't speak from experience, but any large group co-op game goes well for me so I'll say *Rock Band*. Though anything that gets people playing together is great indoors or at a public event!

markopoloman
As great as Warlords may be, it has to be *Bomberman*! Lost far too many hours over the weekend playing that.

witchfinder
Warlords FTW, and this is coming from somebody that plays *Rock Band* all the time at home and these events! If *Warlords* doesn't win this poll I'm going to stamp my feet and scream like a girl…

SirClive
Warlords for me too.

merman
Bomberman is a good choice, because it's so easy for anyone to join in and pick up quickly, and you can have just a single round or a much longer battle if you want. It does need a big screen to make the ten-player Saturn version really work.

TwoHeadedBoy
Micro Machines of course!

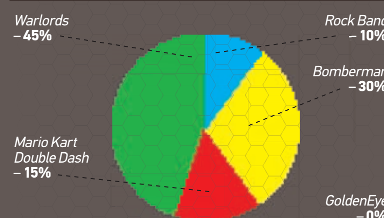
Antiriad2097
I'm a *Warlords* convert after Retro Rewind. There's a raw immediacy to it that's incredibly appealing – so simple but so well executed.

Rinoa
I'm torn between *Bomberman* and *Mario Kart*. Both are loads of fun.

batman877
Eight-player *Mario Kart Double Dash* gets my vote. It's not something you can get to see very often!

FORUM OPINION

Best for multiplayer madness?



Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



"Me? I'm a Computer Programmer"

My Aunt Mimi always told me that playing guitar was a waste of time and would never get me anywhere. But then I went off and formed The Beatles and shook the world.

No, hang on, that wasn't me. And it wasn't my aunt. No. It was my mum. And she was banging on about computer games being bad for the brain and leading to a life of poverty and misery.

Well in your face, mother. I'm HERE, in the pages of **Retro Gamer**. How's about them apples?

I've been lucky enough to make part of my living from videogames – TV shows, hosting events and such like. While I was always confident that I would make money from games, I just wasn't sure how. I initially thought it would be through hustling other kids at school and taking their money like some pool shark in a seedy bar. Well, it turns out that Christopher Kelly was better than me at *Cylon Attack* and he ended up taking all my loose change.

I also thought I could be a computer programmer. Easy. This was at the time when a lot of games were sold independently in the back of computer mags. Again, this moneymaking certainty didn't pan out for several reasons.

Firstly, I just spent ages designing the covers. This was before I'd even started typing anything into the BBC that sat waiting for me in the corner. I'd just draw crazy stuff for ages, come up with exciting titles like '*Time Valley Death Crisis*' and then have to try to write a game around that. This leads us nicely on to the second problem I had in my games programming career: I couldn't write games! My knowledge of BASIC was limited to say the least, and machine code might as well have been Mandarin to me. So I would spend a day trying to change the colour of the screen to red and get something that looked like a speedometer to appear and… oh balls. It would always end, as a lot of things in my life have, with anger, frustration and self-hatred.

Years later, my friend Connon showed me how he overcame his inability to write games and still look cool. He had a good computer head on his shoulders – in fact, we think he may be 47 per cent robot – but just couldn't get games to do what he wanted. So instead, he would spend a comparatively short time on his Spectrum just writing loading screens for games he wished he could write. Then, when his mates were round, he'd say: 'Have a look at this *Star Wars* game I wrote.' They would sit patiently as an amazing title page, with his name on it, would appear on the screen. And they'd wait. And they would wait. Eventually, Connon would say something along the lines of 'Oh, the tape must be knackered. That's a shame. Who wants to play some *Dizzy*?' His face would be saved because the other kids could see that he could program something and all felt sorry that his game hadn't worked. Utter genius. I think.

I would spend a day trying to change the colour of the screen to red

What's the best thing you've blagged? I blagged a Dreamcast before they came out. Someone actually came on a motorbike and delivered it to where I was working.



» The initial floor plan for R3Play is looking very promising indeed.

WE SPEAK TO R3PLAY CREATIVE LEAD GORDON SINCLAIR

R3PLAY SET TO BE TOP GAMING EVENT

Retro Gamer: What inspired you to establish the R3Play event?
Gordon Sinclair: Last year I organised my first ever event, Retro Reunited. I was very proud of what a very small team had managed to produce, but from talking to others with experience of retro event organising, we were all convinced that if we joined forces and put our heads together then we could really push the envelope for these kinds of shows.

Our main goal was to make this bigger than a simple retro community event; we wanted to stage a full-scale expo and really go to town with the quality and quantity of the systems available for people to play on. That is why we were so pleased to be able to team up with not only Retro Gamer, but also with *games™*, as we want to ensure that R3play is an all-inclusive gaming event.

What treats do you have in store at this year's event?
TV personality Gail Porter will be on hand all weekend to open and close the show and present prizes to the various competition winners. Gail is a keen gamer herself, so hopefully we can talk her into taking part in some challenges with some of our other guests too. We will also have a number of gaming celebrities and industry figures in attendance, but rather than have them take part in a simple Q&A session we will be setting up some developer showcases where they can hang out with visitors and mingle freely with the crowd.

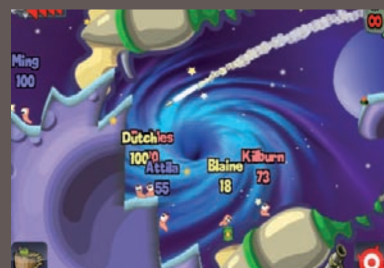
What kind of machines can attendees expect to get their hands on?
R3Play is celebration of the 3 C's: Coin-ops, Computers and Consoles, and we have some of the very best systems and games both old and new. One of the most popular zones in any retro show is the coin-op arcade, so we have teamed up with some of the country's top arcade communities to ensure that we have an amazing selection of cabs. For the computer fan we will be covering virtually every system you can think of, including some very rare import machines that many will have never seen before (and may never again!). On the console front we will again be covering lots of the rare and valuable systems, but there will also be plenty of Sega, Sony and Nintendo consoles to keep the masses happy. Pinball is often overlooked at gaming shows, so we intend to put that right, and expect our Pinball Alley to be very popular.

R3Play takes place on 6-7 November at the Norbreck Castle, Blackpool. Check out www.r3play.info for more.

MICRO BYTES
Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



» Capcom confirms
We always knew that Capcom would begin drip-feeding news of its latest beat-'em-up sooner rather than later. In addition to the characters that have already been unveiled in *Marvel Vs Capcom 3*, Capcom has also announced Captain America and Deadpool, *Darkstalkers*' Felicia and *Devil May Cry*'s Dante. Little has been revealed about them yet, but we do know Deadpool breaks the fourth wall by beating characters with his energy bar. We can't wait!



» iPad infected with worms
We're massive fans of Team 17's *Worms* franchise, so you can imagine how hard it was to calm Darran down when we got wind of a special version of the game for Apple's iPad. Retailing for three quid, the game boasts crisp visuals, auto-save features and – possibly most importantly – a 'pass-to-play' mode, which Team 17 insists recalls the social origins of the title.



» iPad heaven
With the iPad now available, there's never been a better time to check out our app. The **Retro Gamer** app is available for £1.19 and contains your first issue for free. Future issues and back issues can be purchased for just £2.99. Alternatively, you can buy a six-month subscription for £12.99 or a 12-month for £25.99. There's never been a better way to experience your favourite mag digitally, so jump in now by visiting the App Store.

PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *CVG*. I led the *CVG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of CVG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



Lara Croft: Keeping Games Honest

There's so much to say about *Tomb Raider* that you could probably make it the subject of a university degree. But one of the wisest observations I ever heard was from *Zzap!64* veteran Ciaran Brennan, who explained to me why the phenomenon could not have been engineered.

The gist of Ciaran's enlightenment was that no one person was responsible for Lara's sudden rise. It came about randomly from various sources. You could say it was making the cover of *The Face* magazine that was the breakthrough. For me, though, it was mainly that *Tomb Raider* and *Tomb Raider II* had real gaming credentials.

I also smile thinking back at how Core Design was such a respected software house back in the Nineties. The guys were so cocksure, and the idea of a female protagonist was a sign of this confidence. *Indiana Jones* with a girl – that'll make it interesting. My sense at the time was that Core would never have let Lara out without an amazing game behind her.

At the London trade show where *Tomb Raider* debuted, I was shown the game in a hotel suite and asked what I thought. It was obvious that it was incredible, and I remember thinking: 'Why do you need me to tell you?' The editor of *Mean Machines Sega* at the time, Gus Swan, went all-out to support the game with a specially commissioned comic strip and series of covers. I remember US magazine *Diehard GameFan* uncharacteristically showcasing it at preview stage too. That pissed me off too because we'd been promised the first screens on *CVG*.

The astonishing thing about *Tomb Raider* was that it looked as good as *Resident Evil* but you could move the camera. We all fell in love with *Mario 64* for defining the 3D platform genre, but *Tomb Raider* was in development at the same time. It was an original experience that helped the PlayStation's cause more than *Tekken* and *Ridge Racer*.

I'd like to thank Core Design for proving that if the prize is worth it, even challenging and occasionally irritating games can be popular. There was nothing dumbed down about *Tomb Raider* to make it accessible to casual gamers. In the same way, I think this gave Naughty Dog the confidence to make *Uncharted* a great game first, but wryly proves Ciaran Brennan's theory that you can't completely manufacture a pop culture phenomenon.

Tomb Raider was an original experience that helped the PlayStation's cause more than Tekken and Ridge Racer

What's the most expensive game you've bought? That would be the *Tekken 3* PCB and I don't want to say how much. But it was my entire year's bonus.

SONIC SET TO SHOW HIS TRUE COLORS

FRESH NEW INSTALMENTS COMING TO THE WII AND DS





Fans of the world's most renowned blue hedgehog will be pleased to learn that Sega is serving up a double-dose of Sonic-flavoured action in 2010. We already know about *Sonic 4*, which is set to hit XBLA, WiiWare, PSN and Apple's App Store later this year, but recently the company lifted the lid on another new outing. *Sonic Colors* sees our titular hero and his faithful sidekick Tails attempting to free the benevolent alien race known as Wisps from the typically malevolent clutches of Dr Eggman. As the title suggests, the gameplay is built around utilising various hues. By harnessing the powers of the gaily coloured Wisps, Sonic can create different routes through each level, such as drilling through the ground or achieving lightning-fast speed boosts. Development duties are being shared between Sonic Team (Wii) and Dimps (DS), with the home console edition switching between 2D and 3D viewpoints while the handheld iteration uses the unique twin-screen setup of the DS. Recent Wii entries – including *Sonic And The Secret Rings* and *Sonic And The Black Knight* – have been part of the 'Sonic Storybook' series, and while this new episode is being programmed by the same team, Sega has gone to great lengths to make it clear that it's not part of that lineage. In fact, very much like *Sonic 4*, *Colors* is being billed as a return to the glory days of the 16-bit era, with no-nonsense gameplay and intuitive action. It's certainly very promising and could finally re-establish Sonic as a front-running mascot, but lest we forget we've been here several times before and come away disappointed. Time will tell if 2010 is the year in which Sega's favourite son reclaims his rightful place alongside Mario as one of the industry's most beloved characters. *

* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



I've quite enjoyed Sonic's spin-off adventures on the Wii so far, so I'm quite interested in this one. It sounds a little like a *NiGHTS* kind of game, though, which makes me even more intrigued. I'll definitely be keeping an eye on this one.

Stuart



I wasn't a huge fan of what Sega did with the 'Sonic Storybook' games so was initially nonplussed, presuming that *Colors* was just another in the spin-off series. Hopefully it'll be something more akin to the hog's classic exploits.

David



Sonic games have been rather hit and miss since the blue hedgehog first made an appearance. *Sonic Colors* may well be the game to make Mario green with envy. Either that or it'll make him think that he's in some trippy dream.



WHAT IF?

Your favourite current-gen games remade, retro-style

Subject No 12

Red Dead Redemption

IF ROCKSTAR HAD made *Red Dead Redemption* in the 8-bit days, we're betting it might have looked extremely similar to *Gunfright*. Of course, it would have been impossible to host the huge world in a single load, so it would certainly have been a multiload experience on all computers. Aside from that, it would have been pretty similar to *Gunfright*, with little pointing Mexicans acting as waypoints and the occasional gunfight. Good times.



Retro Booty

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO DEEP



Hadouken T-shirt

RRP: £14.95 **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

If, like us, you cannot get enough *SSFIV*, then why not express your support for the game – and help ensure that the game series continues to get green-lit – by donning this fetching *SFIV* tee, which immortalises the most famous special move in the games, namely the Hadouken – also known as the Fireball, the horizontal jellyfish, the electrical moving blue trifle, the amazing Goeman's friction-packed wig attack… you get the idea.

Mario R/C cars

RRP: $25.99 (approx £17)

Buy it from: www.thinkgeek.com

We've featured *Mario Kart* R/C cars in the magazine before, but never ones like these. These diminutive karts are about the size of a human fist, and are available as four different characters: Mario, Luigi, Yoshi or Bowser, each with a selection of 'power-up' accessories. As well as requisite four-way movement, the kart's controls come fitted with a handy 'dash' button, thus offering the most faithful R/C *Mario Kart* experience currently known to man.



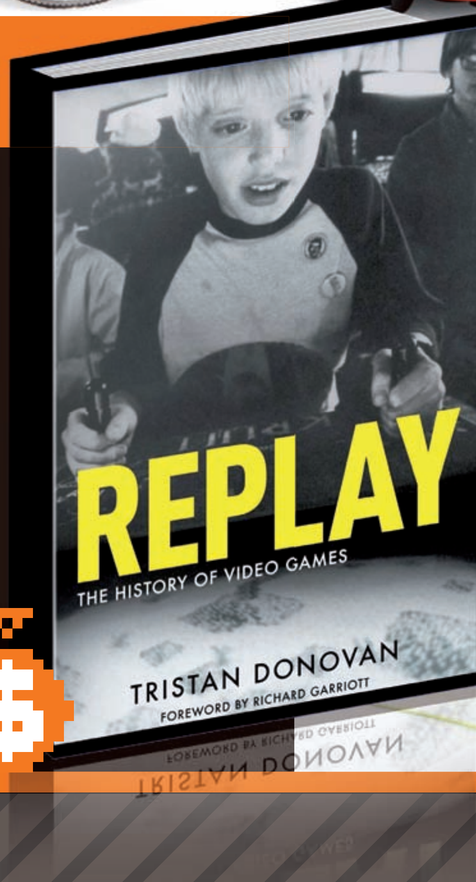
TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Replay: The History Of Video Games

RRP: £12.99

Buy it from: www.amazon.co.uk

It's a big task putting together a book about the history of videogames. While relatively a small medium compared to music and television, equally it's also the most fast-moving, evolving significantly as each new generation brings about new trends, technology and advances. While there have, and will continue to be, dozens of books that chart its history, it's a story that is commonly told from a US perspective (which is acceptable and understandable, of course, given its huge contribution to the genre). Where Tristan Donovan's book differs, however, is that it pays equal reverence to the contribution from Europe and Japan, and plots its tale by focusing more on the games, people and society and less on the hardware and corporations (though they are covered too).







Atari glass tumblers

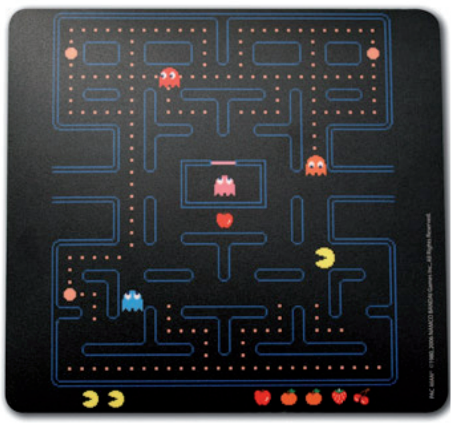
■ **RRP:** $29.99 for 4 (approx £20)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

A must for any Atari arcade game fan, these stylish glass tumblers, which are capable of holding a whole pint of liquid, come in four designs based on the classic arcade games: *Asteroids*, *Centipede*, *Tempest* and *Missile Command*. Astute eyeballs will no doubt notice that the artwork has been tastefully lifted from the game's arcade game cabinet artwork, making them timeless drinking vessels.

Pac-Man mousepad

■ **RRP:** $9.99 (approx £7)
■ **Buy it from:** www.clubnamco.com

Add style to any boring office workstation with this stylish Vynex mouse pad. It features a print of the iconic *Pac-Man* maze. In between all that net-surfing and work you can use it to memorise the game and plot your route around the game's foreboding, neon haunted prison. There's also a *Ms. Pac-Man* version too, making ideal his and hers wedding gifts.



Super Mario plasters

■ **RRP:** £3.99
■ **Buy it from:** www.squareeeyed.com

Accident prone much? Then why not soften future blows with this tin of plasters that have been decorated with characters and sprites from the moderately successful *Super Mario Bros* series of videogames. You only get 15 plasters in a tin, though, so it's best to make them count. Don't go wasting them on covering up paper cuts or fleabites.



Pooka plush

■ **RRP:** $29.99 (approx £20)
■ **Buy it from:** www.clubnamco.com

When thinking up iconic enemies, the Goombas and Koopas from *Super Mario Bros* and the ghosts from *Pac-Man* immediately spring to mind. Rarely gracing these pages, but still a popular and iconic Namco character, is the Pooka from *Dig Dug*. These guys caused Dig Dug all sorts of headaches in his games, but are easily up there with the likes of the aforementioned baddies in terms of enemy notoriety and iconicity.

TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



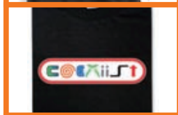
01 Gauntlet
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



02 Amstrad
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Text Adventure
■ **RRP:** $14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



04 Coexist T-Shirt
■ **RRP:** $15.99 - $17.99
■ **Manufacturer:** Thinkgeek.com
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Dizzy
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

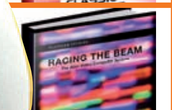
TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
■ **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988 ■ **RRP:** $55 (approx £34)
■ **Author:** Brett Weiss
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.com



03 Racing The Beam
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Publisher:** MIT Press
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Game Over
■ **RRP:** £22.14
■ **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
■ **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
■ **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Pac-Man Hotplate Holder
■ **RRP:** $14.99 (approx £9)
■ **Manufacturer:** Namco
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



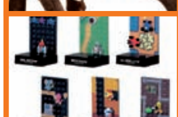
02 Tabletop Arcade Machine
■ **RRP:** Prices vary from £899-1,199
■ **Manufacturer:** Elite Gaming
■ **Buy it from:** www.elitegaming.org.uk



03 Space Invaders TV Game
■ **RRP:** £9.99 ■ **Manufacturer:** Radica
■ **Buy it from:** www.play.com



04 Headcrab Plushie
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Namco Dioramas
■ **RRP:** £5
■ **Manufacturer:** Namco
■ **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com



A MOMENT WITH...

Steve Lycett

Each issue, we put an industry legend in the hotseat. This month, we have a chat with Sumo Digital's Steve Lycett

Who is Steve Lycett?

Steve Lycett has been working in the industry since joining Gremlin as a QA tester. He moved up the ranks to QA manager and then to lead producer. He's currently at Sumo Digital, where he has been involved in everything from the awesome *OutRun 2* to *Virtua Tennis 3*.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing – it's easily my favourite project to date. Of course every time we make a new game I think the most recent is the best! Otherwise, clearly any of the Sumo *OutRun* conversions and I still have a soft spot for the *TOCA* games we did on PSP.

What is your proudest memory?
The day we got told we'd secured *OutRun 2*. I'd been following the game on the web and looking forward to it, so when they got us together and went 'Guys, we're doing *OutRun 2* with Sega', my initial response was 'Get out of here! Really?' That deal went on to define Sumo and what we do, so it's still a very happy moment.

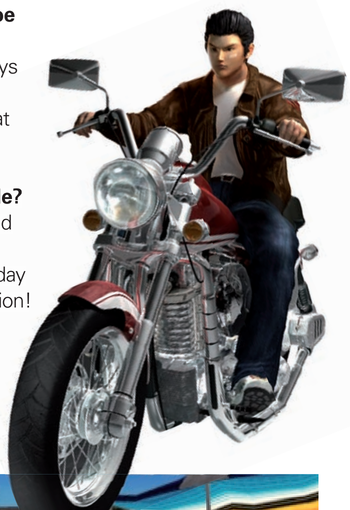
What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
Pleasing a fan base! It seems no matter how much Sega we try to cram into a game, we still get complaints on what we don't include! It's all 'Why don't you have obscure side character X from Japanese SG3000 game Y?" We try our best!

Which industry veteran do you admire?
Having had the pleasure of working with him, I'm a big fan of Tony Crowther. A super clever guy and a real nice chap too. *Realms Of The Haunting* is why I applied for a job at Gremlin too, and am in the business today. I probably owe him a pint!

How would you like your games to be remembered?
Keeping arcade games alive in these days when arcades are going extinct. I miss proper arcades, especially with games at 10p a go.

Which game do you wish you'd made?
F-Zero GX, an awesome videogame, and the best example of Sega and Nintendo working together. I still dream that one day Nintendo will ring us up to do a DS version!





What opportunities has making videogames given you?
Meeting the people behind so many great Sega titles has been a constant pleasure. One day I'll get to meet Yu Suzuki!

What's your darkest memory of being in the games industry?
The day Infogrames closed the old Gremlin offices, we were all pulled up to a meeting. That was pretty tense. Until, when asked if there were any questions, someone said 'Yeah, is Zool an ant?'

And your best?
Finally getting my name at the top of the credits list in *All-Stars Racing*. Sad, isn't it?

Can you share one interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?
We were trying to finish *Hardwar*, and I pretty much didn't go home for three days. On the final night, the programming team, based outside Leeds, fixed the final bugs, then… our internet and network died. In true *MacGyver* style, I hooked up a 33k modem, we transferred the code via Telnet, and then moved it to the burning machines on floppy disks! We built the disks and it made it to shelves on time!

How has the industry changed in the last 20 years?
Everyone forgot that games should be bright, colourful and fun. Loading times don't seem to have got better, either.

> "Everyone forgot that games should be colourful and fun"



» [360] Sumo is well known for its racers. *OutRun 2* is easily its best.



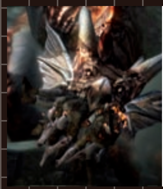
retrodiary

23 June – 22 July

>> A month of retro events both past and present



23 June 1983
■ *Load Runner*, Britain's first computer comic, was launched. The bi-weekly comic lasted just 13 fun-filled yet largely unsuccessful issues.



25 June 2010
■ Despite being a brand new I.P. Demons' Souls has a refreshing retro feel. It's on PS3 only.



27 June 1983
■ Ultimate Play The Game releases its second title, *Pssst*, for the ZX Spectrum.



27 June 1983
■ Mattel's Aquarius was released in the US and four months later is discontinued due to poor sales… that and it being rubbish.



1 July 1985
■ An explosion of spot FX, tunes and colour hit the Spectrum when Rod Bowkett's excellent platform game, *Dynamite Dan*, was released by Mirrorsoft.



30 June 2000
■ The first-person shooter, *Perfect Dark*, developed and published by Rare, became available on the Nintendo 64 in the UK and Europe.



30 June 1997
■ *Carmageddon*, the controversial racing game, is released. Mowing down pedestrians for bonus points gets it banned in several countries.



28 June 1982
■ *Spectral Invaders*, one of the first games available for the new ZX Spectrum, arrives courtesy of Bug Byte Software.



3 July 1984
■ Jack Tramiel, founder of Commodore, buys the Consumer Division of Atari Inc from Warner Communications for $240 million.



5 July 1996
■ One of the best Sega Saturn games ever released, *NiGHTS Into Dreams*, makes its worldwide debut in Japan.



6 July 1983
■ The Sharp MZ 711 makes its first appearance at the Microtrade Show in London. It was hardly seen again…



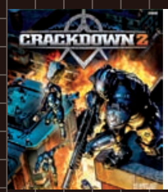
9 July 1984
■ Imagine Software were finally wound up at the High Court and put in the hands of the receivers after failing to repay creditors.



12 July 1987
■ Konami's *Metal Gear*, the game that started the stealth espionage series, was released in Japan on the MSX2 home computer.



11 July 2008
■ The next generation of Apple's iPhone, the 3G, makes its retail debut in America.

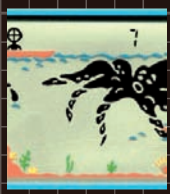


9 July 2010
■ *Crackdown 2*, the sequel to the original 2007 sandbox third-person shoot-'em-up, will be released in Europe on Xbox 360.

9 July 2008
■ An $18.8 billion dollar merger between Activision and Vivendi Games saw the formation of the games publishing giant Activision Blizzard.



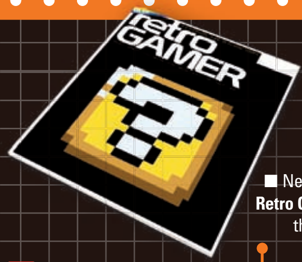
15 July 1983
■ The Nintendo Family Computer is released in Japan. The UK finally got their hands on the NES three long years later…



16 July 1981
■ Nintendo quickly unveils its second Widescreen Game & Watch, *Octopus*, after the successful release of *Parachute* the previous month.



22 July 1982
■ Tangerine Computer Systems announces details about its new micro, the Oric-1, and that it would be available within a few weeks.

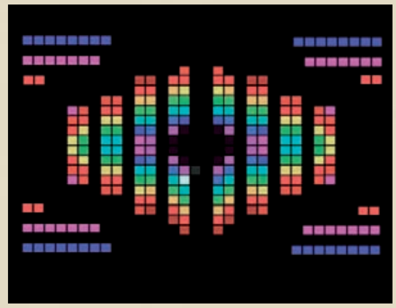


22 July 2010
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



» [Amstrad] Kevin Toms and his beard were back for more uncomplicated yet captivating football management action in *Football Manager 2*



» [VIC-20] *Psychedelia* from Yakmeister Jeff Minter was the forerunner to the most excellent *Trip-A-Tron* on the Atari ST.



» [Spectrum] *Earthlight* was a slick but overlooked 3D shooter from the talented coding fingertips of Pete '*Tau Ceti*' Cooke.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 1988

JULY 1988 – Mirrorsoft puts the BL into Asteroids, Mastertronic gets Kaned again, Llamasoft trips the light fantastic, US Gold goes budget and gives Elite a Kixxing, and Kevin Toms takes Football Manager into extra time. Richard Burton types 99 to continue…

Software house Mirrorsoft finally decided to jump into the well-heeled waters of coin-op conversion licensing territory with news that its first ever coin-op title would be the Atari game *Blasteroids,* an updated and re-imagined variant of the classic *Asteroids.* Turned out to be a pretty good effort too.

Focus Magazines, the publisher behind the long-running *Popular Computing Weekly* magazine, revealed plans to publish another weekly periodical, this time with a purely games-oriented bent. *Computer Games Week* would launch in September and, being a weekly read, would get the latest gaming news onto the newsstands well ahead of the monthly offerings. It sounded good in principle, but reality proved to be somewhat different…

Mastertronic was adding the finishing touches to the release of its sequel to *Kane*, the popular and lucrative multi-level Wild West game. With the original selling well over 250,000 copies, it came as no surprise that a follow-up materialised with John Darnell, the programmer behind the original, once again taking up coding duties.

Unfortunately *Kane 2* never added anything to the original experience. It was already outdated by the time it was released and borrowed heavily from the original, which could have been an indication why Mastertronic ultimately decided to restrict it to the Commodore 64.

The original was a massive hit on the ZX81, Spectrum, Amstrad, Nascom, Breville sandwich toaster and most of the other 87 systems that it was released on, so, after months of development, the time had finally arrived for *Football Manager 2* from Addictive Games to be unveiled.

Kevin Toms had enhanced the game, improved the graphics, and the long delays between screens had also been minimised. It also proved to be a big hit with its simplistic but engaging gameplay.

An expansion followed within a few months, allowing customising of leagues, teams and players. Thankfully, Mr Toms remained faithful to the original, even down to its advertisements. Yes indeed: Kevin Toms and his beard featured prominently once again. Presumably a case of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' – that's the advertising strategy, not the beard.

Another re-imagining of an older release was *Trip-A-Tron*, the light synthesizer from Llamasoft, which improved over the original concept of *Psychedelia* on the VIC-20 and *Colourspace* on the Atari ST.

Okay, it's not a game as such, with Jeff Minter advertising these mind-expanding programs as a non-competitive form of entertainment. They also regularly appeared at computer shows on the Llamasoft stand, often drawing huge crowds and becoming something of a trademark. Long live the Hairy One's algorithms…

US Gold belatedly moved into the budget market with its Kixx label; a vehicle for re-releasing its old hits. The first batch of games to be released at the price mark of £2.99 would include *World Games*, *Metro-Cross* and arcade favourite *Gauntlet*.

US Gold was not only threatening the budget charts but also Elite Systems over its newest release, with claims that Elite plagiarised one of its titles. Elite's game, and thus far its only completely in-house produced product, was the road-racing shoot-'em-up *Overlander.*

Apparently US Gold felt that the game bore too much of a resemblance to its



» [Amstrad] Nintendo flexed its well-toned corporate muscle to get *The Great Giana Sisters* removed from the shops. Boo!



» [Commodore 64] Elite put the wind up US Gold for daring to release a game featuring a car and some shooting…



» [Commodore 64] *Kane 2* looked and played like the original. That, unfortunately, was just not good enough for the gamers of 1988.

own recently released *RoadBlasters* game. US Gold had been quoted in saying that *Overlander* was a plagiarised product. Elite immediately took offence, regarding it as a highly libellous comment.

US Gold had also made veiled criticism of another similar game, *Fire & Forget* by Titus. Presumably its acerbic opinions were induced by the not-insubstantial amount of money paid for the Atari coin-op licence.

And there were further bad vibes for US Gold as two of its most faithful American associates opted to use other companies for their software distribution in the UK. Cosmi was set to defect to MicroProse, while long-time favourite of US Gold, Datasoft, had absconded to Grandslam.

Codemasters was also in trouble over its Sport Aid charity game, *The Race Against Time*. The original inlay featured the legendary sprinter Jesse Owens, but the picture led to copyright issues and was replaced with a Carl Lewis inlay.

Firebird and Rainbird had been extremely busy bunnies over the last few months, with a whole host of titles ready for release on the Amiga and Atari ST. Among the imminent arrivals were the energy-absorbing 8-bit classic *The Sentinel*, a sci-fi arcade adventure called *Pandora*, and Mike Singleton's hugely disappointing 3D shoot-'em-up *Whirligig*. Meanwhile, Rainbird offered up *Corruption*, an adventure from Magnetic Scrolls; and the wonderfully atmospheric 3D shooter, *Starglider 2*.

Multiformat magazine *The Games Machine* cast a critical eye over the latest wave of releases and found a burgeoning list of top games including *Interceptor* (Electronic Arts, Amiga), *Earthlight* (Firebird, Spectrum), *Alien Syndrome* (Ace, Commodore 64), *The Great Giana Sisters* (Rainbow Arts, Commodore 64), *Soldier Of Light* (Ace, Spectrum), *Driller* (Incentive Software, Atari ST), *Thundercats* (Elite, Atari ST), *Gauntlet II* (US Gold, Atari ST), *Darkside* (Incentive Software, Amstrad CPC) and *Platoon* (Ocean, Atari ST).

In the pages of *Crash*, *Where Time Stood Still* (Ocean), *The Empire Strikes Back* (Domark), *Darkside* (Incentive) and *Mickey Mouse* (Gremlin Graphics) were all duly Smashed, while *Zzap!* allowed *Bionic Commando* (Go!) to enter a state of Sizzledom as medals were awarded to *Brainstorm* (Firebird) and the quickly withdrawn *The Great Giana Sisters* (Rainbow Arts).

JULY 1988 NEWS



» Tragedy struck in the North Sea when the Piper Alpha oil rig was destroyed by gas explosions and oil fires.

On 3 July the US Navy shot down an Iran Air passenger plane, killing all 290 people on board. The Airbus 300 was flying to Dubai when the USS Vincennes, which was on patrol in the Straits of Hormuz, fired a guided missile at the plane, believing it to be an aggressive F-14 Tomcat fighter.

7 July saw the world's worst offshore oil rig disaster when Piper Alpha in the North Sea exploded. The rig, owned by Occidental Petroleum, had 225 workers on board when a series of explosions turned it into an inferno, with flames reportedly 100 metres high.

The initial explosion was caused when a missing pressure safety valve allowed gas to leak out onto the rig and ignite. Unfortunately the oil lines weren't shut down by neighbouring rigs and oil continued to pump towards Piper Alpha, fuelling the fires and leading to another huge explosion ripping the rig apart.

In total 167 people died, with many of the survivors seriously injured after jumping 100 feet into the sea, which was alight with burning oil.

And completing a disaster-filled month, 31 July saw a bridge at the Sultan Abdul Halim ferry terminal in Malaysia collapse, killing 32 people and injuring over 1,600 others.



» One of these is a passenger airliner, the other a state-of-the-art fighter jet.

THIS MONTH IN…

ACE



ACE ran an interesting feature on the world of games licensing. It detailed what was involved and how deals were done. It also included pricing on past deals. While Domark paid £20,000 for the *James Bond* licence, US Gold reportedly paid £250,000 for the rights to *OutRun*.



THE GAMES MACHINE



In a similar vein, *TGM* had a feature on the naming of software companies. While most of the article was hypothesis and conjecture, a few factoids emerged. For example, Domark was an amalgam of the two owners' names: Dominic Wheatley and Mark Strachan.



AMSTRAD COMPUTER USER



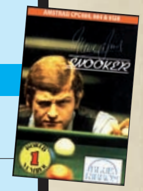
ACU interviewed the coder behind *Rimrunner* by Palace Software. Peter Green had been a freelance programmer and got his big break by attending a show with a handful of his demos. He networked with the Palace guys and got the gig.



CHARTS

JULY 1988

AMSTRAD



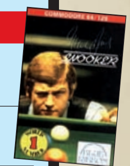
1. Steve Davis Snooker (Blue Ribbon)
2. Super Stuntman (Codemasters)
3. Ghostbusters (Ricochet)
4. Fruit Machine Simulator (Codemasters)
5. Trap Door (Alternative)

SPECTRUM



1. We Are The Champions (Ocean)
2. OutRun (US Gold)
3. Ghostbusters (Ricochet)
4. Cybernoid (Hewson)
5. Kik Start II (Mastertronic)

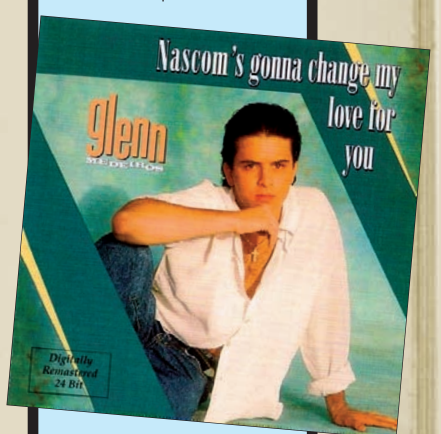
COMMODORE 64



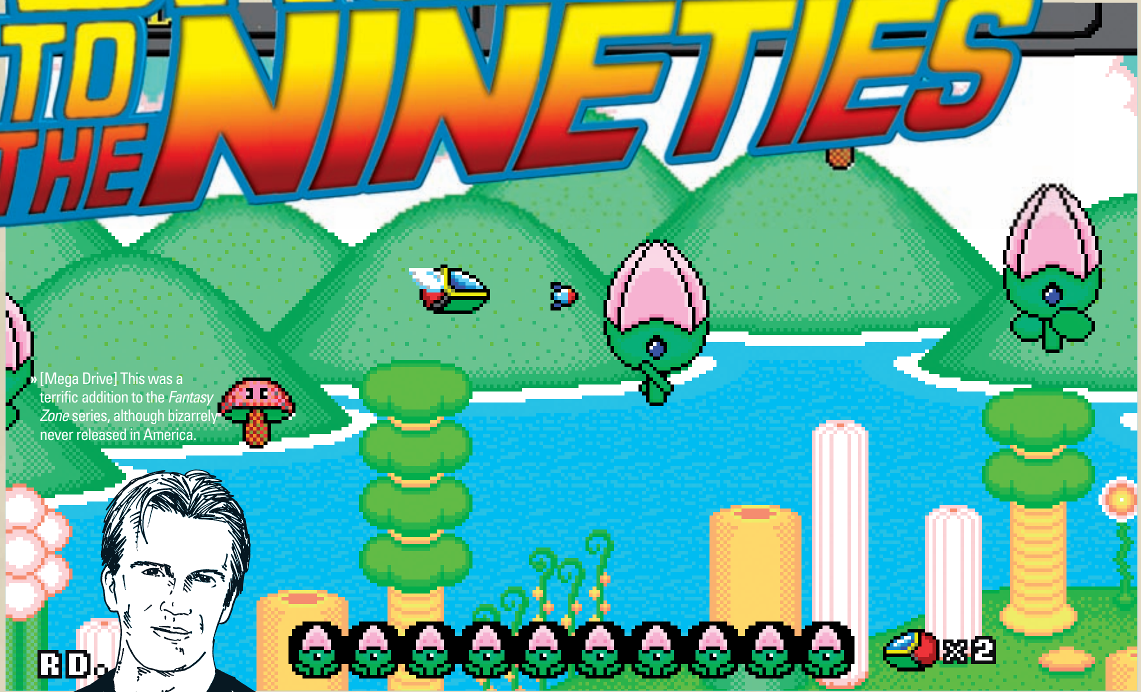
1. Steve Davis Snooker (Blue Ribbon)
2. Target Renegade (Imagine)
3. We Are The Champions (Ocean)
4. Yogi Bear (Alternative)
5. Ghostbusters (Ricochet)

MUSIC

1. Nothing's Going To Change My Love For You (Glenn Medeiros)
2. Push It (Salt-N-Pepa)
3. The Twist (The Fatboys with Chubby Checker)
4. I Don't Want To Talk About It (Everything But The Girl)
5. The Only Way Is Up (Yazz & The Plastic Population)



BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Mega Drive] This was a terrific addition to the *Fantasy Zone* series, although bizarrely never released in America.

CHARTS

JAN 1993

GAME BOY



1. Super Mario Land (Nintendo)
2. Super Mario Land 2 (Nintendo)
3. Bart Simpson's Escape From Camp Deadly (Acclaim)
4. WWF Superstars (Acclaim)
5. Tiny Toons Adventure (Konami)

» [Amiga] First impressions would suggest that you shouldn't touch this platform game with a barge pole. You'd be wrong.





THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 1993

JANUARY 1993 – Developed but unreleased, VR on BBC, The Lawnmower Man is converted, Mega Drive gets a makeover, Creatures lands on the Amiga, and Ocean takes us to McDonaldland. Richard Burton tries a Chicken McFlurry and is unimpressed…

The small development software house Miracle Games had news of its latest project, coming soon to the Amiga. In yet another addition to the random cutesy animal platform game genre, which last month added Bubsy the bobcat, Rolo the elephant and Mr Nutz the squirrel to its growing ranks, with all publishers pompously declaring their character to be the new Sonic, it was Miracle's turn to take on the blue hedgehog by treating us to *Miracle Bat*.

To be released on the Amiga, *Miracle Bat* was an overly hyped product that the press release promised was "cooler than *Zool*, faster than *Sonic*, more complex than *Mario* and with the biggest end-of-level baddies ever seen on any machine".



» [Amiga] Pond is back and this time is plying his trade in space. Nothing new but still very playable nonetheless.

Miracle Games confirmed that it was looking for a publisher after spending more than two years developing the game. Presumably it is still looking for a publisher, as *Miracle Bat* never saw the light of day… which is handy, really, being a bat and all.

SuperHero, a new game from a new developer called Kage and to be published by Psygnosis, would see you create your own superhero, choosing the superpowers, costume and gender, and employing those elements against the supervillain. However, once again a promising-looking game failed to materialise, even though it was previewed and demoed on magazine cover disks.



» It's new, it's slim, it's sleeker, it's the same as the old Mega Drive and it's marginally more expensive. Bargain.

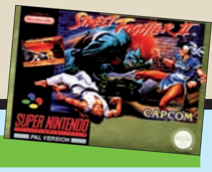
And completing a stunning hat-trick of unreleased titles was *Lobo*. The DC Comics character famed for his super strength and ultra-violence was to be turned into an Amiga game by Ocean Software. It never arrived. Ocean would later (circa 1996) get the chance to put that original no-show behind it by creating a new *Lobo* game for the Mega Drive and SNES consoles. Both were completed but also remained unreleased.

Virtual reality was supposedly going to set the world on fire. *The Lawnmower Man* had been in the cinema, and now the world's first VR game show was about to be broadcast. On BBC Two on 4 January, *Cyberzone* was shown, hosted by *Red Dwarf*'s Craig Charles.

Two teams of two players do battle in a cybertown, with one player controlling their alter ego 'borg' character in the VR world and another controlling a VR buggy to harass the opposition's borg. As groundbreakingly cool as it all sounded, it was slow and frustrating to watch, with the 486-based network busting its motherboards to give a semblance of something high-tech occurring.

It was passable entertainment but disappointing from a videogame point of view. Broadsword, which had much more success with its *Knightmare* series, produced *Cyberzone* with the VR element Superscape, provided by Dimension International – formerly Incentive Software, which was known for its Freescape 3D graphics engine.

The Lawnmower Man may not have been cinematic gold, but that hadn't







SNES

1. Street Fighter II (Capcom)
2. The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past (Nintendo)
3. Super WWF WrestleMania (LJN)
4. Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja (Elite)
5. Top Gear (Nintendo)

MEGA DRIVE

1. European Club Soccer (Virgin Games)
2. NHLPA Hockey (Electronic Arts)
3. Alien 3 (Arena Entertainment)
4. Taz Mania (Sega)
5. Speedball 2 (Bitmap Brothers/Virgin)

MUSIC

1. I Will Always Love You (Whitney Houston)
2. Exterminate! (Snap featuring Niki Harris)
3. Could It Be Magic (Take That)
4. The Love I Lost (West End featuring Sybil)
5. Mr Wendal (Arrested Development)

dissuaded The Sales Curve from attempting to convert the movie to the SNES, Mega Drive and Mega-CD. Quite how the virtual reality element was going to be incorporated remained a point of interest, although ultimately no one need have worried. This side-scrolling shoot-'em-up/platformer had captured the essence of the movie and followed the storyline closely. The VR scenes were made into 3D sub-levels, which worked rather well. Some might say that the game was actually better than the movie itself.

Sega announced that it was planning to release the Mega Drive 2. After much initial excitement and excess moisture release, the details of the console were revealed. Disappointingly, the new Mega Drive was purely a cosmetic overhaul of the original with no new technology added. Smaller, more ergonomic and pleasing on the eye it may be, but would it be cheaper? No…

Thalamus finally announced that it would convert *Creatures* onto the Amiga, with a release due within weeks. With the Commodore 64 original playing superbly and selling extraordinarily well, expectations were high that the Amiga version would be staggeringly good too.

The scrolling platform landscape, sprinkled with baddies who block your path and puzzle elements, was still there, as were the torture screen mini-games complete with bloody chainsaw massacre. It had nice, cute, colourful graphics but failed to capture the spirit of the original and as such was disappointing.

Millennium's flagship character, James Pond, was back and heading for space in *Splash Gordon*, although copyright issues meant that it was later rebranded as *James Pond 3: Operation Starfish*. It was released on the Amiga, SNES and Mega Drive and proved yet again to be a solid platform game on all formats. You would have to wait 18 months for it to finally appear, however, giving plenty of scope for advance previews in magazines to cram in as many fish-based puns as possible.

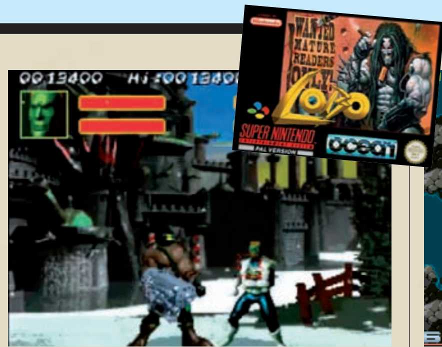
Out this month was a bizarre licensed game by Virgin Games for the Amiga, ST and PC. *McDonaldland* was a *Super Mario Bros*-style platform puzzle game that is exactly what it sounds like: a jaunt around the gherkin-enhanced world of the fast food giant.

The story goes that the Hamburglar has stolen Ronald McDonald's magic bag and legged it off to hide in McDonaldland. Fortunately, the MC Kids, Mick and Mack, arrive on the scene to save the day and the game begins.

All sounds pretty awful but turned out to be a very satisfactory offering. Console conversions arrived shortly after the home micro versions, with the Game Boy and NES editions developed thanks to the coding prowess of Ocean Software.

N-Force was grading its games strictly this month with just three Knockout awards. The lucky few were *Magical Quest* (Capcom, SNES), *Super Star Wars* (LucasArts, SNES) and *Super Hunchback* (Ocean, Game Boy).

Sega Force was equally stringent in awarding its Smash awards. The three recipients were *Castle Of Illusion*, *Super Fantasy Zone* and *Ecco The Dolphin* (all Sega, Mega Drive).



» [SNES] Comic book antihero Lobo was converted into a beat-'em-up on the Mega Drive and SNES, but neither was released.



» [Amiga] Despite looking fine, the Amiga version of *Creatures* just couldn't quite hit the heights that the C64 version managed.

JANUARY 1993 NEWS



» Bill Clinton informs the UN that a new resolution should be passed classing *Manic Miner* as a WMD.

5 January saw the Liberian oil tanker MV Braer run aground on the southern coast of the Shetland Islands, spilling nearly 85,000 tons of crude oil into the sea. It had been travelling from Norway to Canada but lost power in the near gales that were pounding the tanker.

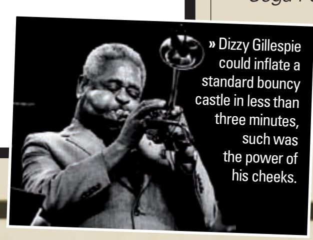
The total spill was almost twice as much as the infamous Exxon Valdez spill off the coast of Alaska.

It was later found that the Braer, built in 1975, hadn't been constructed with a double hull consistent with newer ships, which dramatically cuts the chance of an oil spill in instances of a hull breach. At a later inquiry it also emerged that the tanker may not have been fit to sail at all…

20 January saw William Jefferson Blythe III begin the first day of his first term of office at the White House as President of the United States. Bill Clinton succeeded George HW Bush and continued for two full terms before George W Bush in turn succeeded him.

Clinton had taken his surname from his stepfather, as his own father had been killed in a car accident three months before the future president was born.

6 January saw the passing of Rudolf Nureyev, 54, the Russian ballet dancer; and Dizzy Gillespie, 74, the virtuoso jazz trumpeter.



» Dizzy Gillespie could inflate a standard bouncy castle in less than three minutes, such was the power of his cheeks.

THIS MONTH IN…

THE ONE: AMIGA



Put a group of luminaries in a restaurant and let the tape recorder roll… The feature followed the witterings of programming royalty including Jon Hare and Archer MacLean, whose anecdote about self-removing wine-stained trousers is the stuff of legend.



SEGA FORCE



If you like your fingers fishy and your dolphins on screen rather than in SeaWorld, then *Ecco The Dolphin* ticked the right boxes. For its original concept, terrific graphics, ambient soundtrack and infectious gameplay, it deservedly won a reviewer's award.



SUPER PLAY



Super Play reported on the Future Entertainment Show at Earls Court. It was the biggest games show ever in the UK, and due to the numbers involved, highlights included a lock-out, the local Tube station closing and radio warnings to stay away.

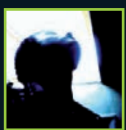


retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link

ZELDAMETROIDVANIA

#26



» NES
» NINTENDO
» 1988

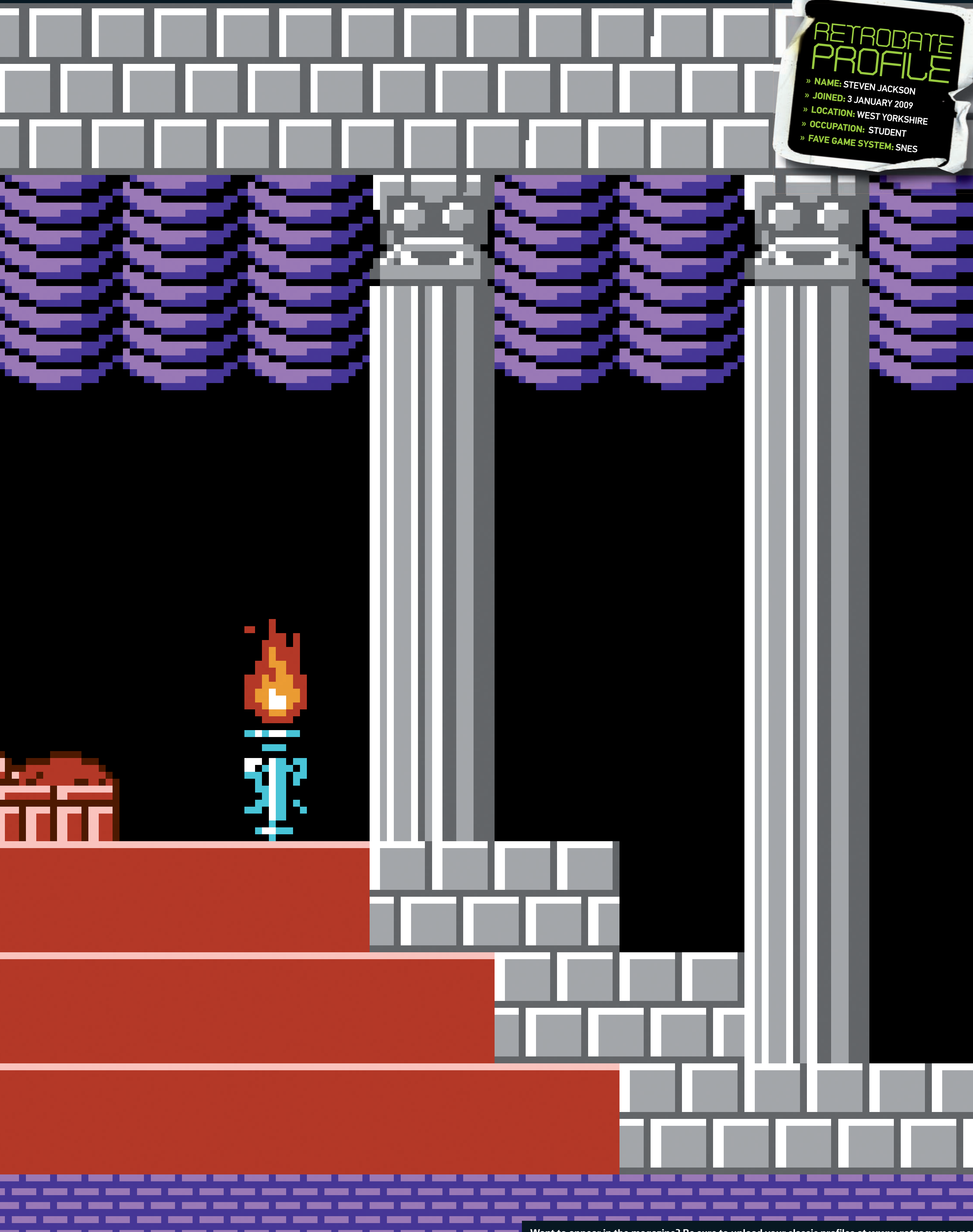
***The Legend Of Zelda* is arguably the greatest videogame series of all time.** Nintendo's masterpiece in adventure gaming has been innovating and entertaining since 1987. While nearly all of the games are heralded by critics and fans alike, one *Zelda* game has had a unique history when it comes to fan and critical reaction. *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* was the final *Zelda* game on the NES and, unlike its predecessor, it didn't receive a warm reception.

Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link is the first and only game in the *Zelda* series (besides the terrible CD-i games) to primarily take place over side-scrolling levels as opposed to the traditional top-down perspective. Now don't get me wrong – it is a shock at first to be playing a *Zelda* game that has the feel of a *Metroid* or *Castlevania* title, but once I got over it I loved it as much as the rest of the series.

The game takes on the standard *Zelda* story; Link has to kill Ganon and save Princess *Zelda*. But along the way (and new to the series, at the time) he needs to talk to various people in the many villages to gain clues and various abilities to eventually kill Ganon. As well as this, a revolutionary combat system was created whereby the player had to carefully dodge and strike the enemies' attacks and weak spots if they were to proceed. These changes may have been minor, but would have a lasting impact on the rest of the *Zelda* series.

In terms of music, graphics and gameplay, like all the *Zelda* games, it's fantastic. Hyrule is large and bright, both through the map and the side-scrolling levels, the music is crisp and full of an 8-bit orchestral feel, and the gameplay is simple yet challenging. Everything a *Zelda* game should have was in this game, so what is there to dislike?

Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link is a fantastic NES and *Zelda* game. It may contrast nearly all the rest of the *Zelda* series in terms of looks and gameplay, but that doesn't make it a bad game. I feel it's quite ahead of its time for an 8-bit game, and I feel that's another reason why people gave it a frosty reception first time around. Nevertheless, it is a truly brilliant gaming experience, and once you get over the changes you really will begin to enjoy this 8-bit masterpiece from the finest gaming series of all time. *



RETROBATE PROFILE

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» **JOINED:** 3 JANUARY 2009
» **LOCATION:** WEST YORKSHIRE
» **OCCUPATION:** STUDENT
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** SNES

LOVING LARA C



When Core created Tomb Raider in 1996 it not only unleashed a 3D phenomenon, but also gave the world one of gaming's most iconic characters. Darran Jones charts the cultural rise of the original silicon chick



Lara Croft is the most famous female videogame protagonist in the world. She certainly wasn't the first, and she went through several changes, but she has touched both the gaming industry and the real world, an achievement that very few other videogame characters, with the exception of Mario, Sonic and Pac-Man, have managed.

Thanks to canny promotion on the part of Eidos – something creator Toby Gard wasn't happy about – the rising wave of 'Girl Power', and simply being in the right place at the right time, Lara Croft transcended typical videogame boundaries and in some ways has become even more relevant to the general public than Mario. After all, can you imagine the Italian plumber being used to sell credit cards, Seat or Lucozade on TV, promoting skin cancer awareness or having his own magazine photoshoot? Also can you even imagine a new *Super Mario* film after the atrocity that was *Super Mario Bros* in 1993? Lara has already had two successful films under her belt with a combined global profit of $196 million, with a third on the way, although it's looking unlikely that Angelina Jolie will be reprising the role.

From non-videogame magazine covers to promoting TV channels, and having both a blue plaque and a ring road in Derby named after her – she had 89 per cent of the vote for that honour, if you're interested – she's certainly come a long way since her conception in 1996, and even her creator never anticipated her success.

"It was all a big surprise for everyone," commented Toby Gard when we first had the opportunity to speak to him via a transatlantic call for the launch of *Tomb Raider: Legend*. "I knew [*Tomb Raider*] was good, I knew that what we were making was dynamite, but I didn't expect it to go to number one and stay there for months."

And yet when *Tomb Raider* was created, Lara Croft wasn't even the main protagonist. Having heard about this for many years, we were keen to find out if this was anything to do with the rumour that *Tomb Raider* started off as *Rick Dangerous 3*. Gard simply gave us an emphatic "No" when we caught up with him again recently, and we also put the question to Jeremy Heath-Smith, one of Core's original co-founders. His reaction was completely different, as he just couldn't stop laughing. "Oh no," he was able to tell us after wiping away tears of mirth. "That never actually happened and I've not heard that before, although it's certainly a nice thought."

So how did Lara come about, then? Realising that 3D was the future and wanting to create a game that was epic in scope and captured the spirit of the best action movies, Gard created a stubbled hero who had more than a hint of the look of a famous archaeologist about him. After presenting his idea, Gard was asked to reconsider his first choice: "I was told I should consider including three other character choices. From there I designed the girl character and I simply couldn't go back."

We asked Heath-Smith why he wasn't keen on using Gard's original creation. "Because it was Indiana Jones," came his reply. "I just looked at him on the screen and I said to Toby: 'It's a great character, but it's Indiana Jones and I have a sneaky suspicion that Spielberg wouldn't be very happy and that he'd sue us. [laughs] The original idea was just too close to an Indy character. So we tried other ones."

Even after Gard's protagonist was created, Lara still went through several changes before he finally settled on a character that everyone at Core was happy with. "I remember taking inspiration from various places and characters at the time like Tank Girl and Neneh Cherry. I looked around at cool characters but not in any one particular place," he recalls. After trying out various ideas, Gard

CROFT



WHAT THE INDUSTRY THINKS



Archer MacLean

What do you think of Lara Croft?

Lara Croft has to be one of the first human type game characters to break out into the real world, with fame assured due to constantly looking like she was about to bust out of her Lycra!

She is certainly a media icon, and after a dozen game titles she's gained enough momentum for Hollywood to make two full-on films, with a third in the making. Short of running for president, how much more famous can you get?

Do you have any fond memories of Lara and *Tomb Raider*?

Well, I spent ages playing the first PSone version in about 1996, as it was one of the best early uses of texturing in an immersive 3D game, although I kind of got fed up with running, jumping and shuffling along ledges.

However, I do have a personal anecdote from the era. Prior to *Tomb Raider*, my then-publisher, Virgin, wanted me to get away from snooker games and come up with a character franchise, especially one not based on Jimmy White. At the time *Doom* was a major hit on the PC – we're talking 1993/94 – and I came up with a very fully fledged design for a game simply called *TOMB*, with the hero running around inside pyramids. Some features of that design would still cut it now in 2010. When I presented it to Virgin's management, the first response was that anything Egyptian had always been the 'kiss of death' and my immediate response was: 'Ahh, that's a cool strap line.' Six months later, out comes *Tomb Raider*, and the rest is history.

Also, one of the lads at work got his photo taken at a games show with the pneumatic Nell McAndrew, barely constrained by green PVC. A large print of it and many other 'art pics' ended up stuck to the back of the loo door at work. Last I heard was that he'd emailed Realdoll asking if they could make one for him.

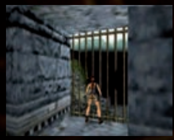
The Adventures Of Lara Croft

Tomb Raider 1996



■ Lara's first adventure had everything: gorgeous visuals, exhilarating set pieces, devilish puzzles and a spunky central character. Add in huge environments to explore and it is little wonder that *Tomb Raider* became such a success.

Tomb Raider II 1997



■ Lara's second outing featured improved visuals, a far greater variety in its locations and a smattering of new moves for its heroine to enjoy. It also enabled Lara to ride a selection of vehicles and was another smash hit for Core Design.

Tomb Raider: Unfinished Business 1998



■ Released to tie in with *Tomb Raider*'s Mac release, *Unfinished Business* consisted of the original game and two additional expert chapters. They were created in San Francisco by Eidos.

Tomb Raider III 1998



■ Non-linearity to *Tomb Raider III* meant it was possible to complete stages in a variety of ways. Add in a new save system and a better balance between action and exploration and it was third time lucky for Lara.

Tomb Raider II: The Golden Mask 1999



■ This expanded edition added an entirely separate five-level mini-adventure entitled *The Golden Mask*, in addition to the entire original version of the excellent *Tomb Raider* sequel.



» *Tomb Raider: Legend* was developed by Crystal Dynamics – the first non-Core *Tomb Raider* – and was well-received.

eventually settled on a braided South American beauty named Lara Cruz. Changes from the marketing department at Eidos, which was publishing the game, eventually meant that Lara's surname became Croft and she lost her South American roots and ended up as a member of the British aristocracy. Lara also ended up with a larger bust after Gard accidentally increased it by 20 per cent; the rest of the team liked the change and it was never corrected. Gard became increasingly frustrated with the changes and requests from Eidos and eventually left Core Design shortly after the first *Tomb Raider* was completed.

One thing that many gamers forget is that Lara's console adventures started off on Sega's Saturn and not the PlayStation. Core Design had already proved to be the master of using Sega's Mega-CD, so it seemed like a no-brainer that its first big next-generation game would end up on the Saturn. The deal that Core had in place for Sega wasn't without its problems, however. "The biggest problem we had was that Core had worked out an exclusivity deal with Sega, giving them *Tomb Raider* a full month before it came out on the PlayStation," continues Gard in a recent chat. "Unfortunately, this did mean that the Saturn version ended up shipping with some pretty major bugs, including one that could actually make the game impossible to complete."

Bugs or not, by the time Lara did arrive the hype for her and what she represented was already at fever pitch, with every aspect of the media, videogame or otherwise, keen to report on the latest Lara news. The global phenomenon that was Lara Croft didn't really take off until the release of the second game, but such was the scale of the fervour surrounding her, Heath-Smith was in no doubt that Core Design had created a monster.

"I still have the original projections for the first *Tomb Raider* game at Core Design," he begins. "We originally said that we needed to sell around 15,000 copies on the Sega Saturn, another 15,000 on the PlayStation and 5,000 on the PC to make money. The first order eventually came in and it was for 300,000 copies and I was like: 'Oh my god. This is going to be slightly bigger than we thought.'"

For all the focus on Lara, it's easy to forget just what a big deal *Tomb Raider* was when it launched in 1996. While *Super Mario 64* launched in exactly the same year and made Lara look rather cumbersome thanks to Mario's nifty, analogue-controlled athleticism, his 64-bit outing was more like snack-sized bites that you could jump in and out of. *Tomb Raider*, by comparison, felt more like how Gard had originally envisioned: a solid, immersive adventure that other games of the time just couldn't match. The tombs that the globe-trotting Lara investigated boasted fantastic scale that really made you fear for our heroine when you started climbing, while the lush environments were full of detail, further adding to the on-screen immersion. Huge in scope and size – good luck completing it on your first run in less than 17 hours – *Tomb Raider* encapsulated everything that made the adventures of Indiana Jones

WHAT THE INDUSTRY THINKS



Martyn Brown

How important was the first *Tomb Raider*?

I think the timing was critical in terms of capturing the imagination of the gaming audience at that time. It also coincided with a relatively strong title, which made for an obviously hugely successful game.

What's your favourite *Tomb Raider* game in the series?

As far as what's the best *Tomb Raider* game, I'm going to stick my neck out and say that *Uncharted 2* does it better than Lara ever did!



» At points, the promotional angle for new *Tomb Raider* games stopped even trying to be subtle.

Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation 1999



■ Here's where it started to fall apart. A dull adventure, unimaginative set pieces and poor level design meant *The Last Revelation* was a disappointment. Playing as young Lara was a nice touch, though.

Tomb Raider Level Editor 2000



■ Only available for the PC, this does exactly as you'd expect and is a fairly comprehensive level editor. It's helped create a huge and active fan community on the net and is still in wide use today.

Tomb Raider III: The Lost Artefact 2000



■ Sometimes referred to as *Tomb Raider III Gold*, this is a sequel to part *III* and released exclusively on the PC. Full of variety, it starts off in the Scottish Highlands and ends up in the catacombs of Paris.

Tomb Raider Chronicles 2000



■ Splitting the main game into smaller flashback levels is a nice touch, but *Chronicles* feels rather tired. The grappling hook makes an early appearance, and Lara gets a few new moves, but this is a pretty bland effort.

Tomb Raider Starring Lara Croft 2000



■ Despite sharing elements with the original game, *Tomb Raider* on the Game Boy Color is a completely different adventure with a new plot and 2D visuals. It's the first *Tomb Raider* on a Nintendo console.

so fun to watch. Battling bad guys, facing off against nature itself and plunging into deep, murky pools was all in a day's work for Lara, and while the digital controls that Core had given her let her down somewhat, she was still absolutely fascinating to watch whenever she was in action.

And action was one thing that was high on Lara Croft's agenda. Running around with her dual-wielding pistols, she epitomised the very body of the 'Girl Power' that the Spice Girls had so successfully engineered two years earlier. Once you'd got bored of constantly manipulating Lara so that the camera would zoom in and focus on her amply pointed chest – we all did this, right? – you could simply focus on the gameplay, rolling around like a lunatic, gunning down wolves like an extra from a John Woo film and running like hell when you encountered that terrifying T-rex. With its atmospheric music, strong characters and impressive cut-scenes, it should come as no surprise to learn that Gard's influences had come from the film world, with the works of John Woo being particularly inspiring.

"I'd just seen *Hard Boiled* and I wanted to get that in because I was so excited about the film," continues Gard on that original transatlantic call we had with him. "I wanted to have that kind of dual-pistol insanity going on, with leaping and shooting and stuff. Obviously it was quite a long way off from that in the end, but that was what was pushing the action forward."

The original *Tomb Raider* became an absolutely huge success for Core Design and an impressive achievement, especially considering the team's inexperience in making 3D games. Shifting huge numbers on all formats – particularly Sony's PlayStation, where it fit perfectly with the mature image cultivated by Sony – it wasn't long before a sequel was announced, and unfortunately for Sega, the poor old Saturn didn't even get a look in.

"We wanted to sell 35,000 copies to make money. The first order was for 300,000"

"There was no question," begins Heath-Smith when we asked him if Sony chased the *Tomb Raider* sequels because it was such a perfect fit for the PlayStation brand. "Sony has gone on record to say that *Tomb Raider* was a cornerstone product to show off what the PlayStation could do. It came about from the success of the first game, the fact that we'd put it out first on the Sega Saturn and Sony were really keen. They approached us and asked if we would be interested [in single-format exclusivity] and we said okay and ended up making a deal that made a lot of sense for all of us. It was phenomenal because it not only sold hardware for them but also sold software for us."

While Core Design buckled down and started planning out Lara's next game, the rest of the world was going absolutely mad for the pony-tailed adventurer. By the time *Tomb Raider II* was released, Lara mania was in full swing. She was appearing on the cover of non-gaming magazines – *The Face* was a particularly memorable example – made headlines on the front cover of *The Times* and, amazingly, she even found time to start a thankfully short-lived pop career. Irish rock superstars U2 contacted Eidos in early 1997, stating that they were keen for Lara to feature in the upcoming PopMart Tour. She made a guest appearance during the tour, with Core creating specific footage to be shown on the 7,000-square-foot video screen.

Perhaps the most fascinating thing about the rise of Lara, particularly when you look at how carefully she's marketed as a brand today, is that her cyber celebrity status wasn't deliberately orchestrated by Eidos or Core Design at all, effectively snow-balling into a global behemoth all by itself.

"If I'm totally honest, that was kind of self-perpetuating," reveals Heath-Smith about Lara's increasing worldwide appeal. "You've got to remember that this was the first major female character in a videogame, so we kind of kept it all under wraps for quite a while because we were just so nervous about the response we were going to get. I remember some press coming to see us and they were looking at some of the other projects we had in the company at the time and we said to them: 'Come and have a quick look at this and see what you think.' They were all like: 'Wow, that's awesome. We need to write about it,' to which we simply said: 'No, you can't.' [laughs] I think what happened was that once this news broke that there was this female character there was this ground swell from all media, and it wasn't just the videogames press. We got blamed for David James losing goals at the England game because he was up all night playing *Tomb Raider*, she was on the front page of *The Face* magazine – she just kind of self-perpetuated. I'd love to say that it was a really dynamic PR machine that kicked into gear, but it really wasn't like that at all."

"To be honest it was all just lucky timing," reaffirms Gard when we recently quizzed him about her meteoric rise to cyber-stardom. "Lara was an unusually strong heroine in one of the first ever third-person games. Because that space was pretty much untrodden by anyone we had the opportunity to do a lot of 'firsts' and that made [*Tomb Raider*] very memorable."

Regardless of how Lara rose to celebrity status, she was now big news. So big, in fact, that she even had a live counterpart to represent her at various shows and press events. While Core Design and Eidos hadn't been behind Lara's meteoric rise, they had come up with the idea to create a real-life Lara – something that still exists today – to act as a spokeswoman for all new games.

"That all came about from going to the big CES show in America," recalls Heath-Smith. "We did a couple of things there, including a digital animation of Lara, where we devised this really clever motion capture stuff. She was on a screen and we were using a camera so that if you walked past she would actually



The Croft Phenomenon

Given how popular the games and Lara became in a relatively short space of time, and because the media took Ms Croft to be the ideal ambassador for the edgy new image that gaming was getting thanks to Sony and its PlayStation, the marketing men were quick to capitalise on the popularity of *Tomb Raider*. Since leaping onto our screens back in 1995, on top of the requisite T-shirts, socks and action figures, Lara has appeared in two big-budget movies, a 50-part comic book series by Top Cow Productions, and a series of novellas published by Ballantine Books. She was also immortalised on the cover of the culture, music and fashion mag *The Face*, helping cement her status as a true media icon, became the face of Lucozade, appeared in an animated series appearing on the subscription-based gaming portal GameTap, and lent her face to four white-knuckle theme park rides – three of which, though, no longer have any *Tomb Raider* association. Still, how many videogame characters since Lara can boast anything like that level of success and celebrity?

The Adventures Of Lara Croft

Tomb Raider: Curse Of The Sword 2001



■ A far more accomplished Game Boy follow-up that features excellent visuals, a nice blend of exploration and action and some intriguing puzzles. It's still simple stuff, but nevertheless works a treat.

Tomb Raider Episode 1: The Eye Of Osiris 2002



■ This was a simplistic platformer created for Sky Gamestar. There are a total of ten levels to explore but tricky controls mean that it's fairly hard to finish.

Tomb Raider: The Prophecy 2002



■ Although it features excellent visuals and plenty of variety, Lara's first GBA outing isn't really that memorable. Little wonder, then, that no other adventures appeared on the platform.

Tomb Raider Episode 2: The Shadow Falls 2003



■ The follow-up to *Eye Of Osiris* is more of the same, but now has Lara battling her way through a huge warehouse, *Impossible Mission*-style. Again, controlling it with a TV remote lets it down.

Tomb Raider Episode 3: Armageddon 2003



■ *Armageddon* changes the concept of the original two games by having you finish the final stage in a tight time limit. It's an otherwise perfect time-waster that suffers like the other games.



» Vanessa Demouy **1997**



» Rhona Mitra **1997**



» Nell McAndrew **1998**



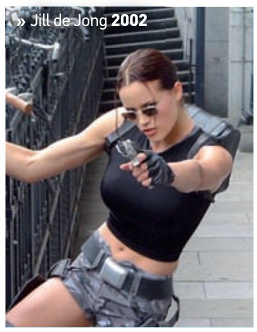
» Lara Weller **1999**



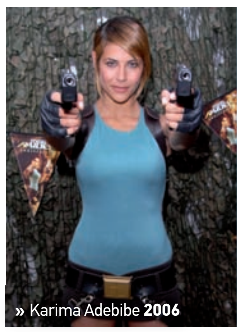
» Lucy Clarkson **2000**



» Ellen Roche **2001**



» Jill de Jong **2002**



» Karima Adebibe **2006**

THE GIRLS BEHIND LARA

■ The first model was Vanessa Demouy, who portrayed Lara from 1996 to mid-1997. Rhona Mitra – who's arguably had the most impressive career post-Lara – carried on the torch to 1998 and so it went on, with Eidos changing the model to usually tie in with the release of a new game – although Nell McAndrew was fired after appearing in *Playboy*, which used Lara Croft without Eidos's permission. The current Lara is Alison Carroll, a gymnast and model who, like Lara stand-ins before her, has had intensive training in order to better understand the role. The impressive number of models that have portrayed her over the years meant that Lara was entered in the *Guinness Book Of Records* for the 'Most official real-life stand-ins'. Over the years costumes have changed to match Lara's latest look, and Nell McAndrew's costume was even donated to UNICEF for a charity auction.



» Alison Carroll **2008**

WHAT THE INDUSTRY THINKS



David Wilson

Head of Sony UK PR

Why was *Tomb Raider* so important for Sony in the PlayStation era?

The market was dominated by Sega and Nintendo, but PlayStation carved its own niche by being, frankly, cooler. It appealed to an older demographic. One of the initial ways it did this was by conscientiously not having a 'mascot'. Sega had Sonic, Nintendo had Mario. Jonathan Ross once made a comment about 'Nintendo Game Boy, Sony Walkman', which seemed fairly apposite. When a mascot finally appeared, it was a different kind – not something that could be perceived as 'childish' but a pneumatic female superstar who was cool enough to feature on the cover of the contemporary style bible *The Face*.

Why does she remain such an iconic character?

Lara Croft was very much of her time – and that's why she maintains cult status. She was hugely popular among the male gamers, but she also crossed over with an appeal to female gamers as well. This may sound naive in hindsight, but Lara rose to popularity in the era of the Spice Girls and Girl Power [as] a girl who was smart, powerful and sassy and more than a match for her male adversaries. She was empowering and also a rarity in videogames, where the hero predictably tended toward the musclebound meathead. Her legacy is possibly not just more female leads in games but also more varied depictions of the male lead.

Simon Pick



Senior software engineer, Electronic Arts

What impact did the first *Tomb Raider* game have on you?

I was annoyed that it was so good! We released *Die Hard Trilogy* at around the same time and I remember standing in the Virgin Megastore on Oxford Street watching a kid playing it and thinking: 'Damn! Why does it have to be so good? No one is going to buy our game now.' On *Die Hard Trilogy* we struggled to create 3D enemies – I was convinced that it was impossible to produce a fully skinned character and keep the frame rate reasonable. Lara proved me completely wrong.

What do you think of Lara Croft as a character?

She proved that you could create a large 3D character that was engaging. Before Lara, game characters were all tiny random characters with no personality. There was a connection with the player that no previous game character had. A few years back I was hiring animators and modellers for a new game, when in walked Lara Croft – ponytail, small round glasses, backpack, khaki pants, the works. It would have been a genius interview technique, had I not been miffed that *Tomb Raider* stole some of our *Die Hard Trilogy* sales! I hope her efforts paid off with a more reasonable interviewer.

Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness 2003



■ Missing numerous deadlines, Lara's PS2 outing felt outdated as soon as it was released. Riddled with bugs, it has some strong ideas but it just feels like old hat. It was Core Design's last *Tomb Raider*.

Tomb Raider Episode 4: Temple Of Anubis 2003



■ Lara's fourth outing on Sky's Digibox sticks to the same tried and tested formula as before, with the same number of levels and same gameplay. Needless to say, it was beginning to get tiring.

Tomb Raider: The Osiris Codex 2003



■ Lara's first mobile phone game is surprisingly fun. It's a 2D platformer with plenty of run-and-gun elements and the odd puzzle to solve. Solid and slick, it's well worth investigating.

Tomb Raider: Quest For Cinnabar 2004



■ This is the second episode of Lara's mobile adventures and it is pretty much business as usual. Lara is now looking for a new relic, but otherwise it features the same solid platforming as before.

Tomb Raider: Elixir Of Life 2005



■ Lara's final mobile adventure was a fitting send-off, easily building up what had happened in the previous two games. It was a little more polished visually and a mite tougher, but still highly enjoyable.



» [PSone] The first *Tomb Raider* was a 3D adventure unlike anything before it.



talk to you. It was quite cool at the time but we felt that you needed something more. At the same time Eidos was promoting other games and it just made sense that we had a Lara lookalike who could come out on stage and do photos."

It was now approaching the end of 1998, and *Tomb Raider II* was gearing up for release. While sticking to the proven template of the original game, Core Design nevertheless brought plenty of new additions to the core gameplay, some of which split the original game's fan base. The globe-trotting aspects of the original game remained, but Lara was now able to use vehicles – something that has continued with various degrees of success – on certain levels, and there were far more human opponents to defeat. Where *Tomb Raider* instantly recaptured the spirit of the *Indiana Jones* films, its sequel was a more modern affair, taking place on the waterways of Venice and even an oil rig in the middle of the Atlantic. Some fans voiced their concerns about the new modern direction that Lara and the franchise was heading in, but the sequel was still a huge success for both Core and Sony, greatly outselling the original and ensuring that Core Design would be in charge of getting another game out in time for the lucrative Christmas season again.

> "Fans began to question whether a year was enough to make a new game"

Lara was still enjoying huge success as Core began working on part three, but the cracks of working to such a strict schedule were beginning to show. Early previews of *Tomb Raider III*, while generally positive, were beginning to question whether a year was enough time to work on a completely new game. Granted, Lara herself would get many new abilities – monkey swinging being by far the most useful – but, for many, it didn't seem enough.

Hot off her stage appearance with U2 on their PopMart Tour, Lara launched a singing career; or rather, Rhona Mitra launched a singing career using the Lara Croft name. Produced by the Eurythmics' Dave Stewart, the album *Come Alive* was an unbelievably cheesy affair consisting of amazingly poor Europop tunes that did little to enhance Lara's image as a globe-trotting adventurer. Unfortunately for Rhona, debut single *Getting Naked* was a less than stellar release, causing the one-time model to give up her career and head to Hollywood, where she has since carved a decent career.

It was during the release of the third *Tomb Raider* game that rumblings first began about a Lara Croft movie, although it would be several years later that the eventual film would come along. It was all a blur for Lara, however, and it was becoming increasingly obvious that Core, too, was beginning to run out of creative ideas for the franchise. Lara had always been depicted as a sexy heroine – much to Gard's chagrin, who left after being unhappy with the promotional direction that his creation was heading in – but by the arrival of *The Last Revelation* the focus was starting to be more on Lara than it was her actual adventures. One famous advert featured a girl wearing Lara's familiar crop top and shorts as her boyfriend smugly lay in bed behind her, while the videogames press was spending just as much time talking about her latest outfits as it did about actual gameplay. It looked like the feisty adventurer was getting out of control, and she was becoming in danger of sinking what had started off as a thoroughly enjoyable franchise.

"All franchises tend to go through ups and downs as they try to reinvent themselves and as different people take charge of it," admits Gard when we asked him if he felt like some of Core's later *Tomb Raider* games began to lose their way. "I remember consistently getting into a lot of trouble and fighting over the marketing campaigns for the original *Tomb Raider*, but at the end of the day everyone has a different interpretation of the character, so things are inevitably going to get patchy as things progress."

"That's certainly something of a dilemma," admits Heath-Smith when we put the same question to him. "Is Lara bigger than the actual games or is the game bigger than Lara? If Lara is in a bad game does that end up damaging Lara as a character? My own view now is that she's probably far bigger than the actual games. Although I do think that if it's a bad game it doesn't really matter what character you have in it. I think the movie obviously had a big impact on that because we personally didn't do a game of the movie in case the movie ended up being bad."

The late Nineties passed quickly for both Lara and Core, and while she remained in the public eye – her Larazade adverts were everywhere at one point – the franchise was turning into the very definition of diminishing returns. The games were still proving popular, but gamers were becoming increasingly disillusioned with Lara's adventures, especially when titles like *The Last Revelation* and *Chronicles* still saw her being controlled with all the ugly finesse of a Tesco trolley with a broken wheel. Core certainly tried to shake things up – *The Last Revelation* was the first

The Adventures Of Lara Croft

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider 2005



■ This was Lara's very first video slots outing by Microgaming. The standard spinning reel action is punctuated by occasional mini-games and it makes for an interesting Lara Croft spin-off.

Tomb Raider: The Reckoning 2006



■ Another side-on quest for Lara that played like a cross between the Game Boy Color titles and the later Sky Digital games that were released. It was available live in Canada via Bell ExpressVu.

Tomb Raider iDVD Game 2006



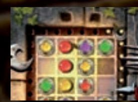
■ Utilising *Angel Of Darkness* footage because *Legend* was still in development, this was an interesting attempt to capture the casual market by splicing footage of the PC version with *Dragon's Lair*-style controls.

Tomb Raider: Legend 2006



■ Crystal Dynamics breathed new life into Lara thanks to solid combat mechanics, clever use of QTE, and a solid balance between adventuring and exploring. An excellent reboot of the franchise.

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Puzzle Paradox 2006



■ Based on elements from *Legend*, *Puzzle Paradox* is a solid little mobile release that borrows from Gremlin's *Deflector* and *Sudoku*. Nothing earth-shattering, but good fun all the same.

Lara Croft's Party Poker 2006



■ This is nothing more than poker with Lara's name attached. You'll battle a selection of Eidos characters – including Gex and Kain – before you get to take on the mad card skills of Lara herself.

"Something was going to have to give. That something was Angel Of Darkness"

time that you could control Lara as a young girl and *Chronicles* depicted Lara's supposed death and was told in the style of flashbacks – but it was becoming increasingly obvious that something was going to have to give. That something was *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness*, but before Lara's sixth videogame arrived she was busy starring in her first feature film.

Ever since rumours began circulating about a Lara Croft movie in 1998, it was hard to imagine anyone else other than Angelina Jolie starring as the heroine. *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* was released to commercial – if not critical – success in 2001 and starred Jolie as the famous archaeologist, her estranged father Jon Voight as her on-screen father, and Daniel Craig as nemesis Alex West. Despite a largely nonsensical plot, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* turned into an enjoyable movie experience, with a strong turn by Jolie and a very commendable box office. In fact, Lara's first film outing not only became one of Paramount's most profitable openings at the time, but is easily the most successful videogame to film adaptation, with its $48.2 million opening easily eclipsing the previous record of $30 million that had been achieved by *Pokémon: The First Movie*.



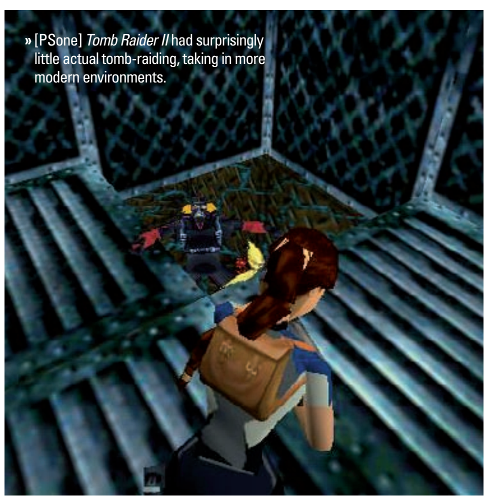
After grossing over $270 million from an original budget of $115 million, a sequel duly appeared in 2003 dubbed *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle Of Life*. Sadly, it was even more poorly received critically than the first film and, despite the addition of action maestro Jan de Bont at the helm, didn't perform anywhere near as successfully as the original film. It still made a $30 million profit, but while Eidos is keen to make a third movie – the latest rumour is a prequel starring Megan Fox in the lead role – nothing else is confirmed.

"The first film was all right but the second one completely lost touch with the character," explained Gard about seeing his creation on the silver screen.

Eidos was far happier however, with Heath-Smith being particularly pleased about how the movies turned out. "We had a lot of creative control," he reveals about the deal with Paramount Pictures. "I was executive producer on both films and one of the conditions was that we had veto over script, actors and actresses and exactly how they would portray Lara. At the end of the day, Lara was our icon and what we didn't want was a movie damaging Lara. I personally had a lot of involvement, from script to directors to cast."

Although Heath-Smith was able to help guide Lara's big-screen outings, the same magic was not sprinkled on Core's last game. Constantly delayed and finally shipping with numerous bugs, *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness* was a massive disappointment for both Core and Eidos, receiving average scores from all corners of the gaming community and causing Eidos to have a massive rethink about the franchise's future.

"I listened to far too many people and there was a huge amount of pressure put on us," begins Heath-Smith when asked about Lara's darkest videogame moment. "We actually let the marketing people get involved, which was our biggest mistake. We wanted to do an updated version of the original *Tomb Raider*, but they were like: 'No, you can't do that. We need to bring her into a new age and make her far more interactive.' Sadly we were just too over-engineered and it was actually thought about too much. It was a shame because the work that was put into that game I can't even begin to tell you. The man-hours in that game were huge, absolutely huge. The biggest problem with it was the controls. We just struggled and struggled with getting the controls right and trying to do so much with her. Again we just over-engineered it. We should have done what we did on the other five games and simply told them all to bugger off. Sadly the commercial



» [PSone] *Tomb Raider II* had surprisingly little actual tomb-raiding, taking in more modern environments.

WHAT THE INDUSTRY THINKS

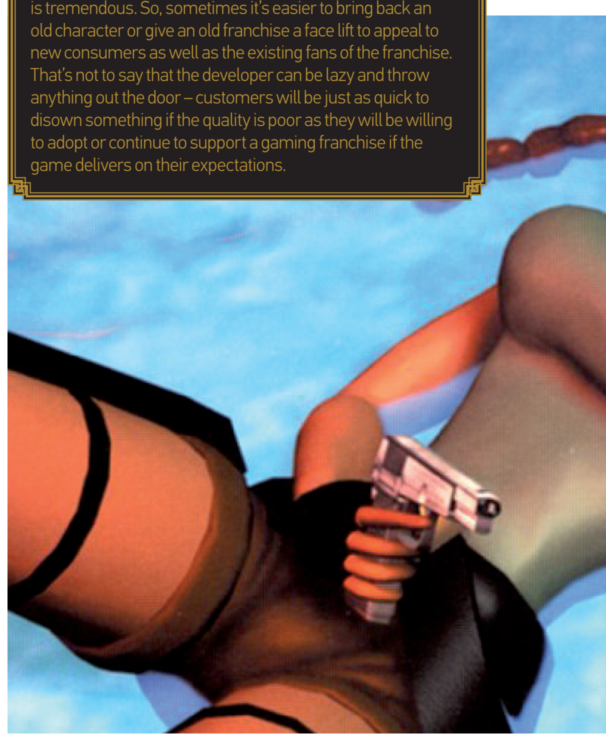


George Andreas
Design director, Rare

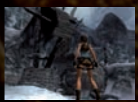
What was the first thing that hit you when you saw *Tomb Raider* for the first time?
How incredibly immersive the overall experience was at the time given the limitations of the hardware. Also, it wasn't really pandering to the other games of its era, it wasn't overtly cute, it wasn't about collecting lots of shiny objects and it wasn't about twitch skill gameplay – it was brave and bold and ultimately succeeded in introducing an original character to the world 'outside' of videogames.

What's your favourite *Tomb Raider*?
For me, the first one. Creating the first of any series is always the biggest creative and development challenge. Defining what that is and executing that to a high level that really resonates with people is no mean feat.

Why does Lara Croft remain so popular?
I guess you could ask the same question about some of the other high-profile videogame icons of the same era. Mario and Sonic also remain popular to name but two, regardless of what we may think about the quality of some of their outings over the years. Creating new IP is fast becoming a fading art as the financial risk developers and publishers face is tremendous. So, sometimes it's easier to bring back an old character or give an old franchise a face lift to appeal to new consumers as well as the existing fans of the franchise. That's not to say that the developer can be lazy and throw anything out the door – customers will be just as quick to disown something if the quality is poor as they will be willing to adopt or continue to support a gaming franchise if the game delivers on their expectations.

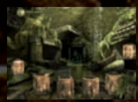


Tomb Raider Anniversary 2007



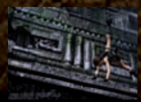
■ Taking over from Core Design, Crystal Dynamics revisited and expanded upon the original game. It's not quite as polished as *Legend*, but remains a fitting tribute to Lara's very first adventure, ably updated.

Tomb Raider: Secret Of The Sword 2008



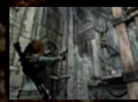
■ *Secret Of The Sword* was a video slot machine that featured Lara performing *Tomb Raider*-themed tasks like shooting targets in the bonus rounds. Fans of the series unsurprisingly shouldn't go out of their way.

Tomb Raider Underworld 2008



■ Although Nathan Drake steals Lara's thunder a little, we really enjoyed *Underworld*. An interesting setting and improved mechanics meant another hit for both Eidos and Crystal Dynamics.

Tomb Raider Underworld: Beneath The Ashes 2008



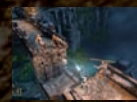
■ Released exclusively on Xbox Live, the first piece of *Underworld* downloadable content featured an extended jaunt for Lara beneath Croft Manor. It's a decent if short addition to the series.

Tomb Raider Underworld: Lara's Shadow 2009



■ The second piece of DLC is far cleverer, allowing the player to control the Doppelganger that appears at the end of *Beneath The Ashes*. There's a greater emphasis on combat, but it's again a little too short.

Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light 2010



■ Lara's first co-op adventure is already looking like a hell of a lot of fun and successfully blends *Robotron*-style controls with some impressive puzzles in a downloadable package. It also looks beautiful.



» *Tomb Raider: Legend* was hailed as a return to form after a dip in quality for the series.



» Lara's bathing technique is unorthodox. All that fame must have gone to her head.

stakes that were around then were so huge that we didn't have a lot of choice."

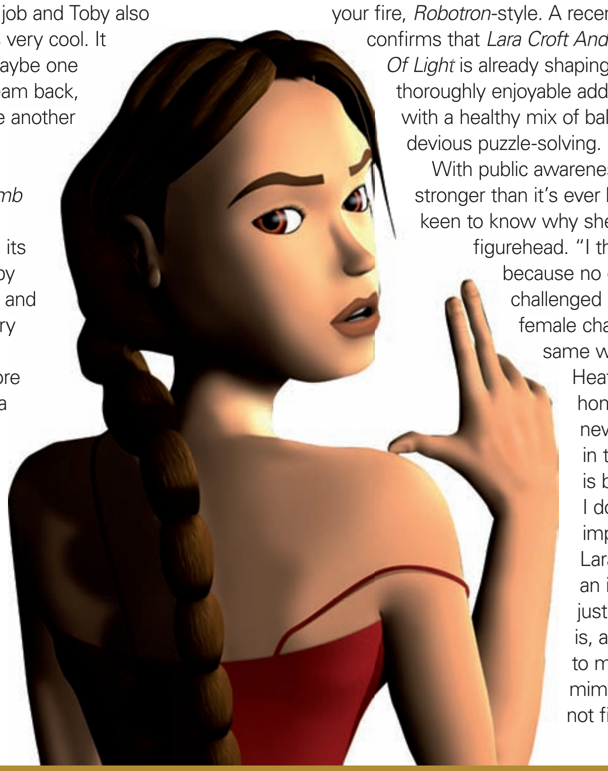
Angel Of Darkness's performance at retail saw the shock announcement by Eidos that the next game in the series would be created by American developer Crystal Dynamics, which was best known for its *Legacy Of Kain* franchise. The news was met by howls of disgust from the fan base, but when *Tomb Raider: Legend* was released in 2006 it turned out to be a damned good reboot. Quick-time events were cleverly segued into the main gameplay and the addition of a new grappling hook proved more than a fancy gimmick, while the available puzzles were also of a very high standard. Lara was back on track, but Core Design had been hit hard by both the loss of its signature character and the Heath-Smith brothers, who departed to form Circle Studios and took a good 70 per cent of Core's staff with them. The company was unable to cope and what was left of it was sold off to Rebellion in 2006.

"To be really honest with you, it was time for a change," admits Heath-Smith about Crystal Dynamics taking over the franchise. "The team had been on that project for six games, which is too many, and it did need a shake-up. The sad part was that the shake-up was in America and at that time I had left, so there was nobody there fighting the corner. I thought it was really sad to lose a British icon to America, but to be fair they've done a really good job and Toby also got re-involved, which was very cool. It is sad, but who knows? Maybe one day we'll get the original team back, secure the game and make another one. That would be quite a headline, wouldn't it?"

After the success of *Tomb Raider: Legend*, Crystal Dynamics further stamped its authority on the franchise by revisiting the original game and implementing the back story changes that had begun in *Legend*. Interestingly, Core had also been working on a tenth anniversary edition of the game for the PSP, but disaster struck when Core revealed early screenshots in June 2006, only for Eidos to announce that it would be created by Crystal Dynamics the following week.

Tomb Raider Anniversary was finally released in 2007 and proved a fitting tribute to Lara's original adventure. It felt instantly familiar to anyone who had played the original classic, but also contained enough new elements to stop boredom from setting in for even those who had completed the original numerous times. It was followed in 2008 by *Tomb Raider: Underworld*, which was not only a grittier vehicle for Lara but also featured far more underwater action than in previous adventures. Fortunately Crystal Dynamics was more than up to the task, and the end result was another solid adventure that easily built on the building blocks that the developer had first created with *Legend*.

And so we come to *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light*, her most interesting-looking adventure yet. Released purely as a downloadable game with Crystal Dynamics once again at the helm, it introduces many new and interesting play mechanics. The most exciting is the addition of a second playable character called Totec, which greatly changes the core gameplay dynamics and also ensures that you can solve the game's many puzzles in a variety of different ways. Armed with a spear and shield that Lara can climb on to reach higher areas, he's too heavy to walk on his own spears himself, but Lara can pull him around with her grappling hook. There's also far more focus on all-out shooting, with the right analogue stick controlling your fire, *Robotron*-style. A recent hands-on confirms that *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* is already shaping up to be a thoroughly enjoyable addition to the series with a healthy mix of balls-out action and devious puzzle-solving.



With public awareness of Lara now stronger than it's ever been, we were keen to know why she's such an iconic figurehead. "I think it's mainly because no one has ever challenged her and created a female character in the same way," concludes Heath-Smith. "To be honest, bringing out a new female character in today's market is bloody difficult. I don't think it's impossible, but Lara is very much an icon of her time, just like James Bond is, and it's very hard to match that without mimicking it if you're not first to market."

A big thanks to **www.tombraiderchronicles.com** for its help



Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light

The Interview



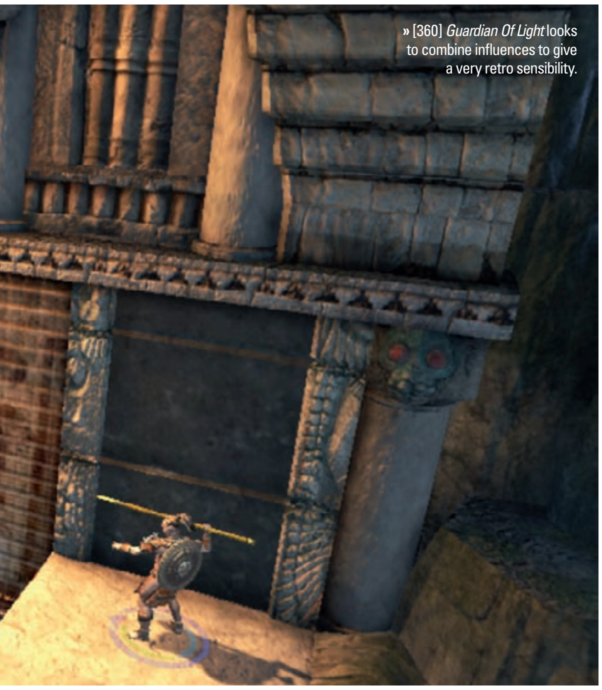
We chat to global brand director **Karl Stewart** about Lara Croft's upcoming adventure

■ So why did you decide to call your new game '*Lara Croft*' as opposed to '*Tomb Raider*'?
For one, the game is focused squarely on Lara. We made the decision to differentiate the two names because going forward we see the *Tomb Raider* moniker as being indicative of the larger, epic adventures. By focusing on Lara we are also able to touch into new areas and facets of the character and gameplay, such as introducing a new co-op mode. The name '*Guardian Of Light*' is based on the storyline and you're going to have to play it in order to find out why.

■ So what does a digital platform offer you compared to a traditional retail release?
The digital platform offers us the opportunity to be a bit more experimental with our approach to designing a game. The only real restriction that we've faced is the download limit, which is pretty much set at two gigs. The team were so motivated to create a unique and new experience for this digital space that they could have built a game double or triple its size.

Downloadable games also take a lot less time to create compared to a traditional pillar release. So far we've been working on *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* for about 14 months, and by the time we finish, it will be somewhere around 16 months.

■ How long have you been working on the game?
I've only had the pleasure of working with the guys on this particular game for the past nine months. I was



» [360] *Guardian Of Light* looks to combine influences to give a very retro sensibility.



"We've had hundreds of fans play it, and they all had huge smiles on their faces"

previously on *Batman: Arkham Asylum* and before that *Tomb Raider: Underworld*.

When we shipped *Batman* back in August I was so energised with the vision that [studio head] Darrell Gallagher and the team at Crystal Dynamics had that I decided it was time to take all of the experience we'd attained while working on the publishing side straight to the heart of the actual game.

Over the past nine months I've begun creating a whole new team driven to taking ownership of the brand, PR and community directly within the studio and carving a path for success in the future.

■ So what do you feel it offers over traditional *Tomb Raider* games?

We believe that *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* allows us the opportunity to take on some new, exciting and risky challenges. Take co-op as the biggest example of that vision.

Co-op actually fits within the world of this game perfectly. It allows players the ability to communicate and play the game in a completely unique and different way compared to past titles, and without changing the fundamental pillars of what it means to be playing a game within the *Tomb Raider* universe.

■ So you see the two-player co-op mode as being very important?

Definitely, as we're about taking bold risks. For years now we've all been avid fans of our own *Tomb Raider* community, so when [creative director Dan Neuberger] and the team sat down to create this brand new game, we set them the challenge of creating something that would not only push the boundaries, but also be engaging the community in a new and totally different way. By adding a two-player co-op mode to a traditionally single-player experience, we believe it will bring players together in a way never dreamt possible in previous Lara Croft games. Hopefully when players get their hands on it they'll feel the same way too.

■ Do you think this co-op could work in traditional *Tomb Raider* releases?

We believe it could. We've actually done more research and focus-testing on this game than ever before because of the co-op mode. We've had countless hundreds of fans and casual gamers sit and play it for hours and hours – most of whom were complete strangers when they walked in – and by the end of the session they had huge smiles on their faces. They were engaged on a whole new level like never before. So we believe that the co-op mode certainly can work within the franchise.

With that said, though, we've also spent a lot of time creating a single-player experience within *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* that will challenge even the hardest fan of past *Tomb Raider* games. So although it may sound like we're all about co-op right now, that's not the case at all. The single-player mode has been a large focus of our effort due to it being an integral part of the Lara Croft and *Tomb Raider* heritage.

■ What's been the biggest problem about this game from a design point of view?

In the early days when the idea first came up there were, of course, perceived problems. Creating a game with an isometric view camera when you've traditionally been creating games in third-person would put the shivers up a lot of development teams, but to be honest, as soon as the engine team got their hands on it they worked their magic.

As it's our own engine, building the game with the team meant it didn't take long to create a new camera system that allowed the development team to imagine this new world. The CDC engine has now been used on *Legend*, *Anniversary* and *Underworld*.

■ What's it like being in charge of such an iconic videogame character?

It's awesome.

As I mentioned, I've worked on several *Tomb Raider* titles in different ways, so I've seen a lot of Lara over the years and loved every minute of it. This time around, though, things have changed, and we're approaching the responsibility of managing such an iconic brand in a unique and different way.

We've recently created a whole new department within the studio focused on developing the IP in new and exciting ways. I look forward to what the future holds for Lara Croft and the *Tomb Raider* universe. It's exciting times.

■ Can we expect additional downloadable content to support your new game?

Let's see how this one does first. This is a bold new move for us, and one that we are not taking lightly. Going forward we're all about making sure that we do our utmost to give 150 per cent to everything we do and ensure that the experience is built from the ground up. This means focusing on the job in hand. If we are successful with this title then we'll see. There's a ton of great ideas where this one came from. The team are extremely creative.

■ Why do you think Lara remains so popular?

Gamers of today grew up with Lara. *Tomb Raider* was one of the first, if not the first, true 3D gaming experiences, and as a result of that people remember her for being one of the first games they ever played. As they say, you never forget your first.

Over the past 15 years Lara has also transcended videogames and entered into our lives in new and exciting ways. She's become an icon not just within the videogame space, but within the entertainment industry. This has helped her become a true icon of the modern day.

BOSS/RUSH

THIS MONTH, JON SCHOLES TRACKS DOWN AND INTERVIEWS YORGLE, RHINDLE AND GRUNDLE FROM ATARI'S 2600 SMASH, ADVENTURE

YORGLE, RHINDLE AND GRUNDLE

So how did you come to be in the dungeon in the first place?
Rhindle: We were looking for work and we spotted an advert for guardians of a magical dungeon. It seemed like a good opportunity.
Yorgle: Better than the burger bar we were working in at the time.
Grundle: Me guard things.

Was it a good place to work?
Rhindle: The pay was awful, but there were always plenty of adventurers to eat.
Yorgle: And we never had to bother about walls or anything, what with being able to fly over any barrier.
Grundle: Flying is fun.

Your job was to guard the chalice…
Rhindle: We all had different jobs around the dungeons and castles.
Yorgle: That's right, I looked after some of the keys, and Grundle here guarded the bridge and the black key.
Grundle: I like eating people.
Rhindle: And I guarded the white key and did most of the chasing of the adventurers.

Did you ever find out what was so magical about the chalice?
Yorgle: I got told it was the fountain of youth.
Rhindle: They told me it was the Holy Grail.
Grundle: Flashy lights.

Were you ever defeated in the dungeons?
Rhindle: Occasionally, if the adventurer had managed to find the one sword we'd hidden in the dungeons.
Yorgle: Yes, the sword was the only thing that could defeat us.
Grundle: Arrrrgh, splat.
Rhindle: We weren't really killed, but we'd lie down and ignore the adventurer until he left.
Yorgle: And we'd made it so big that you needed both hands to carry it, so you couldn't carry anything else as well.

So was it easy for the adventurers to get you with the sword?
Yorgle: If we were feeling nice, we'd rush towards the adventurer whether he was holding the sword or not.
Rhindle: And other days we'd just run away if the sword was around and so we couldn't be killed at all.

How do you feel about the bat that shared the dungeon with you?
Grundle: GRRRRRRRRR!
Rhindle: We don't talk about the bat.
Yorgle: Ever.

How many adventurers have you eaten?
Grundle: Lots.
Rhindle: I think I lost count.
Yorgle: I'm not sure there's a number high enough, but if there is then add a couple and you've got it.

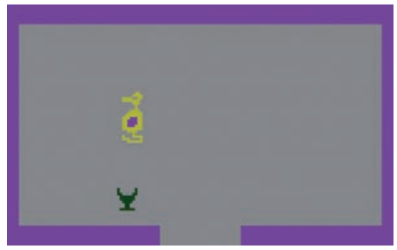
Can I ask why it is you look like some sort of dragon/duck hybrid?
Yorgle: None of us can help how we are made, and I think the long snout adds class.
Rhindle: It's all the better to eat you with…
Yorgle: Why do you look like a squishy bag of meat?
Rhindle: Lunch, as we call it.
Grundle: Yummy meat bag.

…Okay, well thank you for your time.
Rhindle: Where do you think you're going?
Grundle: Yummy meat bag lunch…

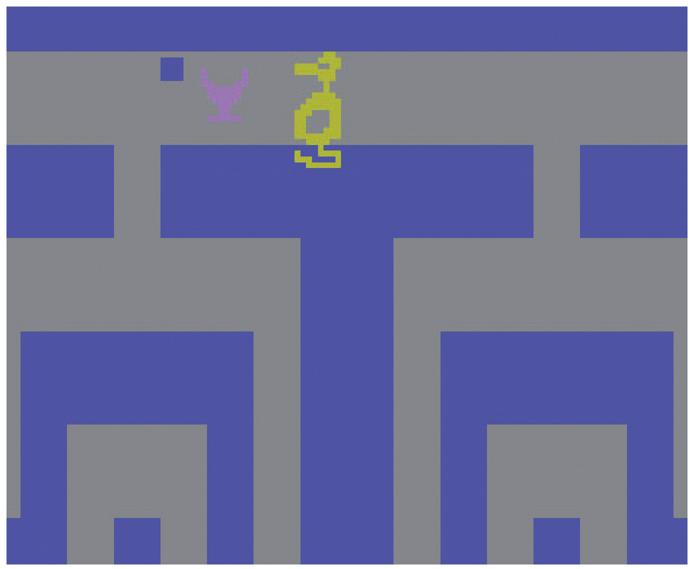


GAME INFO

- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ATARI 2600
- » **RELEASED:** 1979
- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- » **DEVELOPER:** WARREN ROBINETT

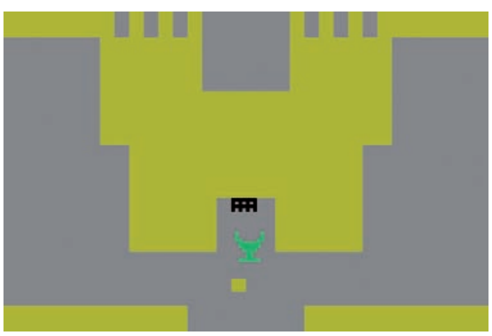




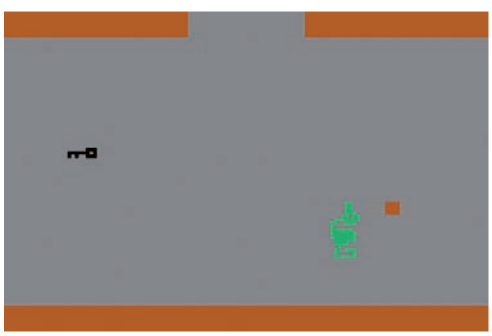


» [Atari 2600] It's time to start running!

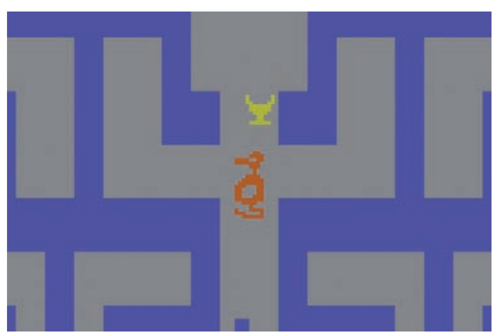
> **"We don't talk about the bat. Ever"**



» [Atari 2600] See? It wasn't so hard



» [Atari 2600] Is it meditating or actually dead?



» [Atari 2600] Rhindle lying between us and the prize. We're screwed.

It's a jungle out there. Swing through it



iPad

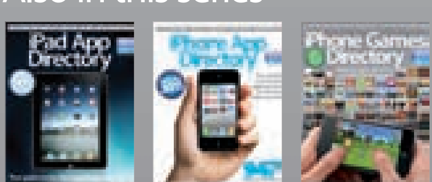
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RETRO SHAMER

» EXPOSING RETRO GAMES THAT ARE PROBABLY BEST LEFT IN THE PAST

AWESOME POSSUM... KICKS DR. MACHINO'S BUTT



» [Mega Drive] Amazingly, Awesome is actually standing on this see-saw. It shows just how poor the collision detection is.

GAME INFO



- » **SYSTEM:** MEGA DRIVE
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PUBLISHER:** TENGEN
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER



» [Mega Drive] So very tempting. So very, very tempting. Must resist. Must.



A WORD FROM THE HERO

"Hey, it's me, Awesome Possum. I'm so cool. I make medicine sick. I'm gonna clean up this place. Wow, I just spoke... I said 'Wow I just jumped'. Wow, I've just repeated myself. I'm so cool. Do you watch *Lost*? I do. It's great. That submarine episode was awesome. I'm babbling, aren't I? I'm so cool. I'm perfectly normal by the way; nothing wrong with me. Does anyone have a loaded sword I can store in my mouth? I want to clean up this world."

This, dear readers, is possibly the worst 16-bit platform game to ever grace the planet, and there's some seriously tough competition. *Awesome Possum*, or, to give it it's full title, *Awesome Possum… Kicks Dr. Machino's Butt*, is a game that, while not quite as shameless a *Sonic* rip-off as, say, *Socket* (an equally dire game that also appeared on the Mega Drive), seems to take choice influence from Sega's classic platformer. But then, probably in a bid to stop Sega from ringing its lawyers, it hides them deep inside a game so atrociously bad that even if the game was called *Bonic The Bionic Hedgehog Versus Dr. Ovoid Man*, Tengen, its creator, could probably have still got away with the striking similarities on the defence of the game being blatant satire.

Awesome Possum is one of those games with a 'message', and, as is always the case with any platform game boasting a 'message', this 'message' is the safeguarding of the environment. The first stage for example takes place in forest that's in the process of being torn down by an army of chain saw-wielding robots, and Awesome must collect floating litter to earn points. Enemies and dangers include tree-felling machinery, giant bear traps and suicidal jet fighter pilots who like flying around at tree-level 'polluting up' the place. There is also a level set in the Antarctic, and a really ugly stage that takes place in some kind of scrap/sewage plant – we should state, though, that when we started this level the graphics were so garish and undefined we actually thought we'd discovered a kill screen.

Between each stage, the game also asks players multiple choice questions about the environment, and all are pretty easy to work out if afforded a little thought (well, all of the questions we were asked were). Such fantastical examples we've just thought up for the benefit of this article include: when threatened, the Texas Horned Toad squirts its target with: a) blood, b) Orangina or c) Orangina mixed with blood? And: which animal squirts blood at its target a) The Texas Horned Toad, b) Seagulls or c) Crabs?

Putting the environment aside for one moment, though, how does the game measure up and actually play? Well, things don't improve, unfortunately. *Awesome Possum* appears to be a few animations short of a full game, with a hero that twitches around the screen like a Czech cartoon and must suffer collision detection that feels just as woolly. And matters are certainly not helped with some atrociously unfair level design of the 'unless you play the game like *Splinter Cell*, you won't be able to react fast enough to what's coming ahead' persuasion.

The final nail in a coffin constructed using only final nails is the main hero himself – an irritating creature with a stupid name, who dresses in a blue leotard and sees it perfectly acceptable to comment on every tiny little action he does in the game. 'Wow, I'm so cool!', 'What a fall!', 'That was incredible!', 'I'm gonna clean up this world!' is just a small example of the continual barrage that diminishes whatever remaining charm this platform game had left. Quite simply, Awesome is possibly the un-awesome Nineties platform character ever, and given that upon playing this game your likely reaction will be to kick it out of the nearest window, probably also holds a harmful effect on the environment too.

» THE POINTLESS PARTS



QUESTION TIME

Between stages, Awesome is asked a question by some aggressive animals. Get it wrong and they give him to poachers.



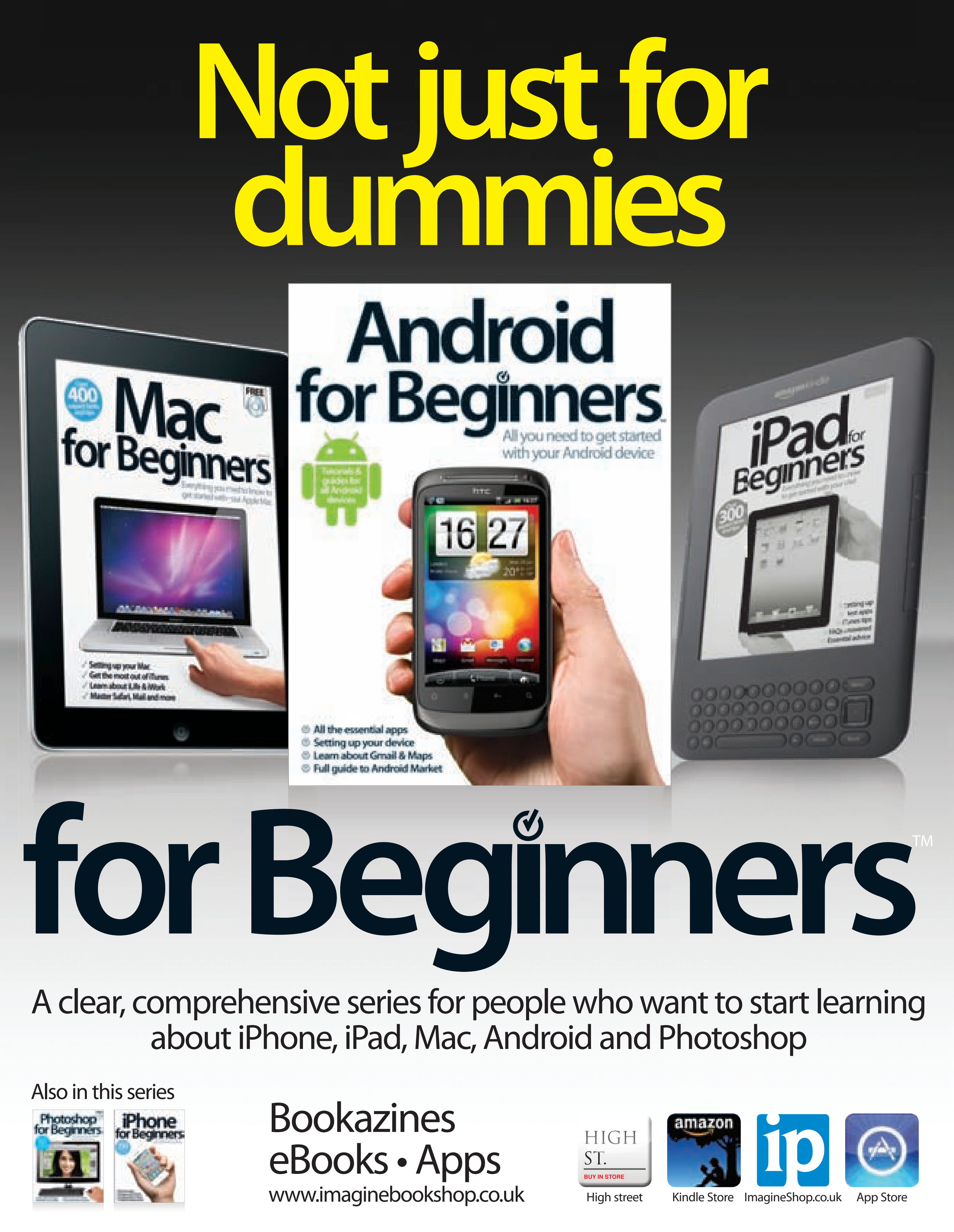
OPTION SCREEN

Rather than letting you tweak the game, it lets you review and tweak the difficulty of the between-stage questions. Great.



BEAST RIDER

These animal-riding bits offer an admirable diversion away from maddening gameplay, but you still can't polish a turd.


Not just for dummies
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Android for Beginners
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All the essential apps
Setting up your device
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for Beginners™
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Bloody Wolf

WHEN YOU ABSOLUTELY, POSITIVELY GOT TO KILL EVERY MOTHERF**KER IN THE ROOM, ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTES

» RETROREVIVAL

» PC ENGINE
» DATA EAST
» 1989

The PC Engine had some truly cracking arcade conversions available on it, and one of our favourites is this little gem by Data East. Originally released in the arcades during 1988, *Bloody Wolf* was ported to the PC Engine – the only machine that it was actually converted to – just a year later. The end results were magnificent, with the little crisp packet-sized console managing to churn out lots of impressive-looking sprites.

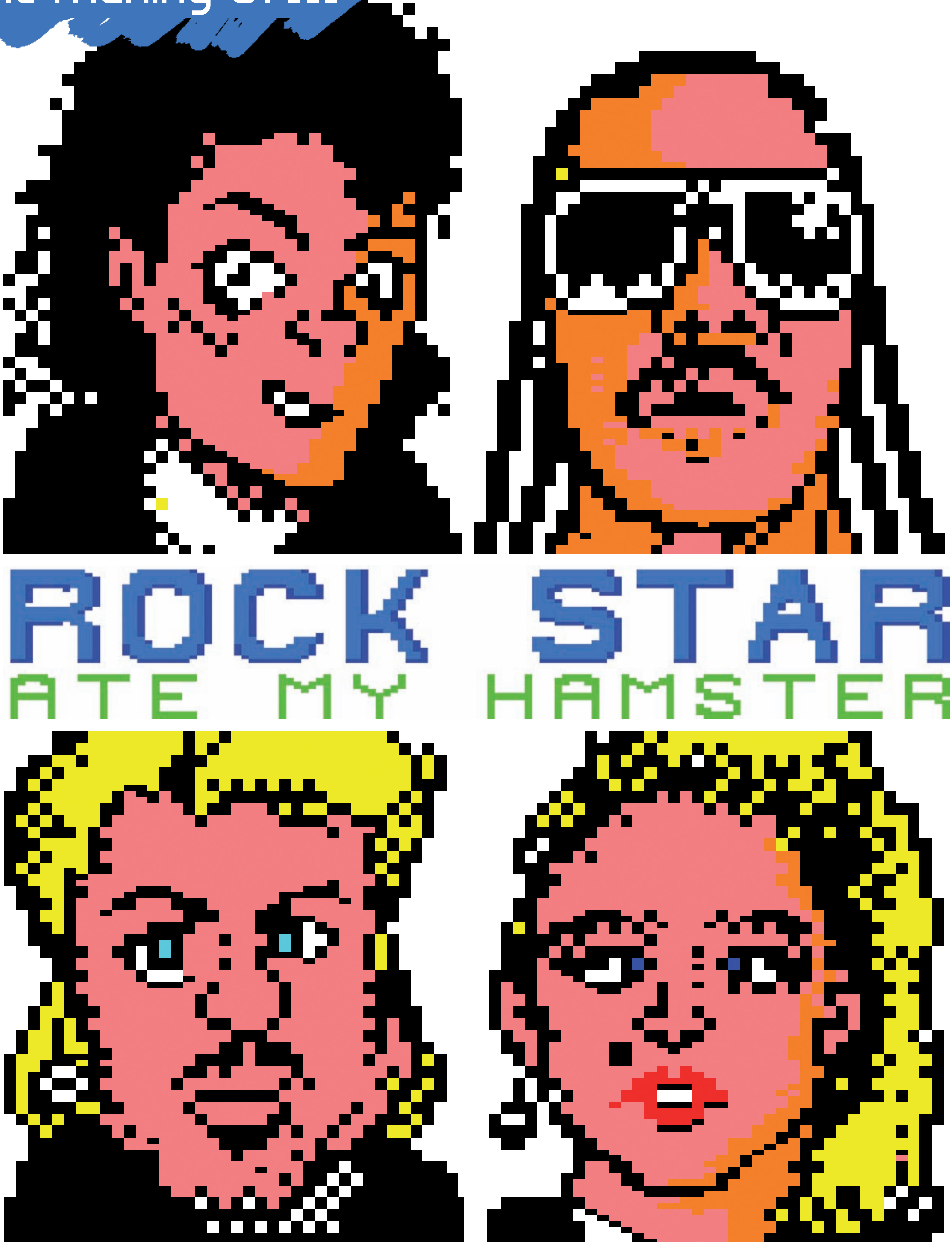
Taking elements from the likes of *Ikari Warriors*, *Mercs*, *Heavy Barrel* and *Midnight Resistance*, it's a glorious run-and-gun game that has you running around and causing as much mayhem as possible. Hostages are tied up at strategic locations (mainly in houses) and you will need to rescue them all as you plough through *Bloody Wolf*'s eight stages. There's plenty of variety in the levels, the sprites are well drawn and animated, while the audio is full of punchy, throaty effects that really help set the tone for your man on a mission.

Sadly, the PC Engine version loses the second player compatibility that made the original coin-op version so much fun to play, but it does include an additional stage, the ability to converse with hostages and a rather woolly plot involving a kidnapped president (aren't they always?) that wasn't in the original arcade game.

Even with the lack of a second player, *Bloody Wolf* remains excellent fun to play thanks to its quick pace, solid array of power-ups and the ability to jump on enemy motorcycles and continue your bloody crusade on wheels. *Bloody Wolf* is not only a great example of the genre, but once again proves just how powerful NEC's minute console actually was.

Now available on Nintendo's Virtual Console service, we would recommend *Bloody Wolf* to anyone who loves a good run-and-gun shooter. The fact that it's full of copious amounts of gore, sports a ridiculously high kill count and can be picked up for under a fiver (on the Virtual Console, at least) just makes it all the better. *

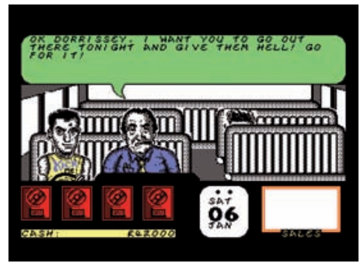



ROCK STAR
ATE MY HAMSTER

Darlings, hamsters and microcomputers. It can only mean one thing: this month Retro Gamer has a making of Rock Star Ate My Hamster. Stuart Hunt speaks to its creator, Colin Jones, and gets an all-access pass behind one of the most controversial games of the Eighties



» Since leaving game programming in the Nineties, Colin Jones has been busy pursuing his true passion: music.



» [CPC] At points Cecil and Clive get to leave the drudgery of the office behind and take a trip in the tour bus.



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLATFORM:** SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, COMMODORE 64, AMIGA, ST
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** SIMULATOR
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID

» [CPC] You kick off helping Cecil and Clive select the artists they'd like to spend the next 12 months babysitting. That's Elton John, by the way; not Ronnie Corbett.

It is one of the most fondly remembered and controversial business simulators of all time, with even *Rolling Stone* acknowledging its infamy by ranking it among the top 50 rock and roll computer games ever created. High praise indeed, especially when you consider that the game in question was never released in America and our transatlantic cousins aren't really known for 'getting' our wry British wit, something that *Rock Star Ate My Hamster* radiated through every pixel.

Rock Star Ate My Hamster was a satirical look at the music biz. It plonked the player beside failed theatrical agent Cecil Pitt and his punkish sidekick Clive, at the point at which the duo is attempting to break into the music industry and become the next Stock Aitken Waterman – well, three quarters of that trio anyway. The game featured all of the major rungs that you would expect to see on the musical management ladder, with players signing artists, sending them off to practise, booking gigs, keeping them sweet with gifts, paying their wages, organising outrageous publicity stunts, recording albums, and even shooting music videos to ensure that your artists would ascend into great things. To complete the game, the player had to help one of Cecil and Clive's artists release an album and achieve four gold discs within the space of a year. Failure to achieve this goal, running out of money, or simply losing all of their musicians through poor management would result in game over. Essentially, *Rock Star* was a tongue-in-cheek business simulator, with decisions made through a simple 'what do you want to do next?' interface and the relevant actions played out on screen by the game's two bungling heroes.

Rock Star Ate My Hamster was the brainchild of game programmer Colin Jones. Growing up, Jones was always interested in music, but his very first taster of the appealing properties of computer games happened in the early Eighties, when, after seeing a Texas Instruments computer displaying a rudimentary-looking game round a friend's house, he was instantly captivated by what he saw.

"I didn't see games; I saw cartoons moving on a screen – cartoons that the player controlled," remembers Jones. "That's what I wanted to do, so the following week I bought a Sinclair Spectrum and learnt what I needed to do. Then I sat down and did it. That's how you get to do things, I realise now."

After spending several months teaching himself to program on his Spectrum, Jones eventually landed work with various software companies. His early output included the Speccy shooters *I'm In Shock*, *Sarlmoor*, and the Automata UK games *ID* and *Deus Ex Machina*, where he worked alongside the legendary Mel Croucher. The latter game, incidentally, was instrumental in helping Jones to come up with the idea behind *Rock Star Ate My Hamster*.

"I looked around and saw how crazy the games industry was. I'd worked on interactive music videos with Mel Croucher and people just didn't want to know," he says. "*Deus Ex Machina*, Mel's interactive movie with Ian Dury, Jon Pertwee and Frankie Howerd, had bombed. I think that's on record – hope I'm not spilling any beans here. Most of the wholesalers refused to stock it, as I remember, which made it difficult to get hold of. Satire is a form of despair. What do you do when the world ignores genius? You can either laugh or cry. So I wrote a funny game about my favourite subject: music."

A few years later, and having worked with various software companies, Jones was now looking for a publisher to pick up his game idea. At the time he had heard through the grapevine that Codemasters was open to new and inventive gaming concepts, and so approached David and Richard Darling



with his idea. And what did the young Darling brothers think of his pop star management game concept?

"They were right behind it. 100 per cent," Jones smiles. "We talked everything through, but in the end they let me have my head, as it were. I was surprised at how open to ideas they were. I guess they must have thought that it was the kind of game they'd like to play. Richard said he'd have bought it. I guess he did really, and for a lot more money than most people paid. Codemasters putting *Rock Star* out surprised a lot of people, but when you met Richard and David it made complete sense. They were young enough to be open to new things, and successful enough to make it happen. And I was in the right place at the right time, so maybe you do make your own luck."

With the Darlings fully behind the project, work on the game could finally begin. The team that contributed to *Rock Star Ate My Hamster* comprised Jones on writing/programming duties, Chris Graham on graphics, and Allister Brimble and Paul Hiley lending hands with the in-game music. Given that the game was based, albeit loosely, on the inner workings of the music industry, we had to ask whether Jones had spent any time actually researching the business to ensure that Cecil and Clive's humorous rags to riches story carried at least a small pang of authenticity?

"Good grief no. None of it's real. It's all based on lies, hearsay and wishful thinking," he laughs. "Tony Wilson of Factory Records had a laugh playing it, though. I was a big fan of music – still am. I knew enough about how people perceived the music industry to make an entertaining game about it. The mathematics were quite simple: you sell more records to make more money. Of course, your artists can get a little big for their boots, and you can always make bad decisions. It's a juggling game with jokes."

Rock Star Ate My Hamster was also remembered for its humour and satire, with the belligerent Cecil frequently sniping at poor old Clive, blaming him for every single thing that goes wrong in the game – seemingly forgetting the fact that it's actually Clive's inheritance money that is bankrolling their venture in the first place. As well as the duo's amusing riffs and banter, the musicians in the game were all hilarious parodies of famous pop stars, such as Wacky Jacko, Maradona and Bill Collins, and each was given a wonderfully accurate-looking caricature.

"Chris Graham can and should take 100 per cent of the credit for those," says Jones. "I don't know how Codemasters found him but he was the man for the job. Flawless. Those pictures still make me laugh. He was a genius."

Rock Star Ate My Hamster benefited from having one of those indelible game titles, like *Donkey Kong*, that is impossible to erase from your memory. The title was, of course, a play on the infamous 'Freddie Starr ate my hamster' headline that was printed in *The Sun* in 1986. The story reported that after returning home one night after a gig, a famished Freddie decided to prepare himself a sandwich using his then-girlfriend's pet hamster as filling. It was a ludicrous-sounding tale that was later revealed to be a complete fabrication by the comic's publicist. However, while the hamsters of Britain could sleep soundly inside their straw-filled homes again, Starr's career benefited from the publicity and Jones was gifted the

> "You can either laugh or cry. So I wrote a funny game about my favourite subject: music"



PUBLISHER HIGHLIGHTS

DIZZY (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: CPC, C64, ZX SPECTRUM, AMIGA
YEAR: 1988

MICRO MACHINES
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1991

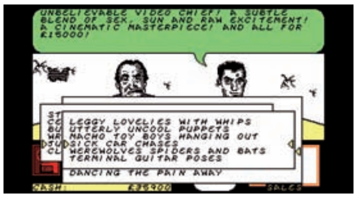
GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR
SYSTEM: CPC, C64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1987

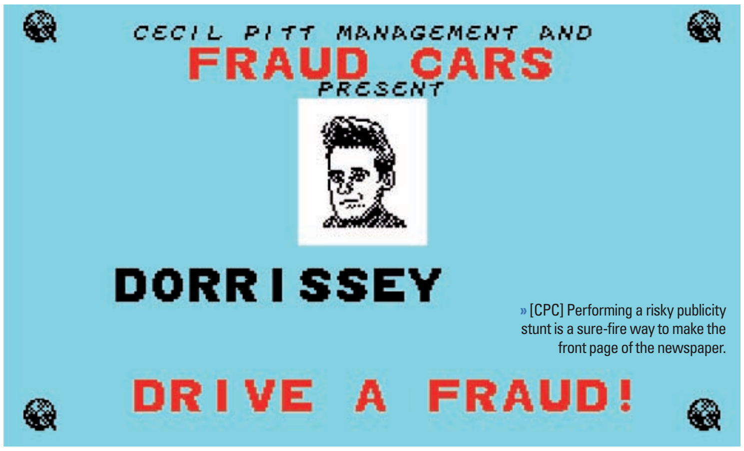


LUCY'S UNUSUAL SUNDAY

It may not come as a huge surprise to learn that Colin Jones's first passion has always been music, and since leaving game development behind in the early Nineties he has been applying his creativity to various audio projects. He produced *Cadw Swn*, a ten-part CD series designed to help people to learn Welsh through music and stories, and **www.gettingquiet.com**, a short audio course that gives simple, practical relaxation exercises. His most recent project, though, is *Lucy's Unusual Sunday*, a five-track music CD that features artwork by Howard David Johnson. It's to "help lead listeners into a quieter state of mind". Those interested in finding out more should take a look at his website (**www.colin-jones.com**), where the CDs and lossless downloads are available now.







» [CPC] Performing a risky publicity stunt is a sure-fire way to make the front page of the newspaper.

perfect title for his game. Were any other titles ever considered?

"We had a few titles but Codemasters let me run with *Rock Star Ate My Hamster*. It summed up the game really – where it was at. You knew you weren't going to get *Football Manager*, although maybe you were going to get *Football Manager On Ice*," he answers.

When the game was finally released, it courted a bit of controversy for Codemasters. In hindsight, it's difficult to understand why people got so up in arms about the game, given that it feels quite tame today. We suspect that the vitriol may have stemmed from the game's edgy humour; the Spectrum version's divisive title screen, which displayed a character who resembled Lemmy from Motörhead flipping the bird – this was changed to a line-up of musicians in subsequent conversions – and the occasional flash of comic titillation on the front page of the game's fictional newspaper, The Stun, whenever Clive organised a questionable publicity stunt for one of his artists.

"The game got banned by newsagents and chemists," remembers Jones. "You couldn't make it up. They removed the game from their shelves. The cheek. A chain of newsagents selling firearms magazines and porn decided that the game was corrupting the youth. Bah. Yeah, bah. That's worth two 'bah's, definitely."

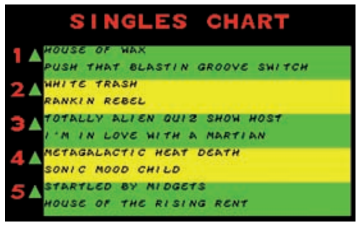
As well as receiving a bit of flak from retailers, the game didn't get the warmest of receptions from the gaming press, with some reviewers, though not all, doubting the longevity of the game. *Crash* awarded the game 70%, and in its review reported that: "If you ever wanted to manage your own pop group then *Rock Star* would quash any such tendencies." *Your Sinclair* liked it even less, giving it just 64 degrees and remarking that: "Anything David Darling claimed to be 'hilariously funny' was bound to be tragic." So what does Colin think about the less than favourable reviews the game received at the time?

"Some people enjoyed playing it but gave it bad reviews," remembers Jones. "They questioned its longevity, but didn't play it long enough to find out. But people still remember it today. *Rolling Stone* magazine put it among the best 50 rock and roll videogames of all time. Not bad for a game not even released in America!"

Thankfully, the British public did take to the game, appreciating what Colin was trying to do and helping to push it up the software charts. But was it an eventual chart-topper?

"I think it got to number two. That's how I remember it. It probably would have reached number one without the ban," says Jones. "Yes, it still smarts. We also did a special competition edition for *The Sun*, with extra characters, so it was quite a big deal."

Following *Rock Star Ate My Hamster*, Jones worked on the splendid *Dizzy*-esque platformer *Slightly Magic* for Codemasters – more about that in a future issue – before making the decision to leave the games industry behind – although he tells us that he is pondering a return. Having worked on



» [CPC] The game would frequently flash up the singles and album charts. It's pretty exciting watching your artist get repeatedly snubbed by the British public.

some of the most inventive and original British games of the period, Jones's was certainly a short but important contribution to the industry. So why did he decide to bail out so soon? And, in hindsight, does he ever wish he'd stuck at it for just a little bit longer?

"I saw the future of the games industry as a bright interactive playground of mind-development, interactive movies and limitless potential," he says. "I wanted to push the boundaries. The games industry, with a few notable exceptions, wanted *Space Invaders*. I look at today's games sometimes and think I must be dreaming. What went wrong? The UK had a cottage industry of genius. It was like punk rock, if you squinted a little and lied to yourself. Then the global companies took over, and everything got sort of the same. A line from my favourite adventure game springs to mind: 'Suddenly… nothing happened.' And nothing happened for a long period of time…"

POP PARODY

Rock Star Ate My Hamster featured over 50 musicians that Cecil and Clive could sign and manage, and all were hilarious parodies of real-life pop and rock stars. The musicians at your command comprised humorous send-ups of Eighties icons like Rick Ghastly and By George, global superstars Tina Turnoff and String, and even rock stars such as Izzy Asbeen and Lumme. Though the parodies were clearly done in the spirit of good satire, we did wonder whether Jones had sought permission from the musicians, or their respective record companies, to use their likenesses in the game? "Me? No," he smiles. "I think the Darlings took legal advice and were told that humour was fine – a tradition of satire, or something. And people do have a sense of humour. Thank God. You know, if I'd thought about it I'd probably never have done it. I was making fun of my heroes. Sorry everyone. I'm so very sorry."



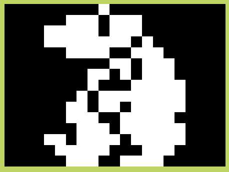


THE CLASSIC GAME



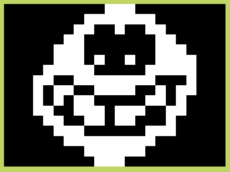
MONTY ON THE RUN

Poor Monty. Banged up for nicking some coal during the miner's strike, he's now on the run after being broken out of Scudmore Prison by his best pal, Sam Stoat. Hounded by the most horrific collection of beasties seen since the last time Miner Willy threw a party, Monty must use all the acrobatic skills he picked up in the big house (no, seriously) to plot his escape route to a little boat to France. Yup, it's another crazy Eighties platform game featuring an anthropomorphic animal, but *Monty*'s one of the best, with plenty of neat touches. Join Craig Grannell as he discovers the best way for a rotund cartoon insectivore to escape the fuzz.



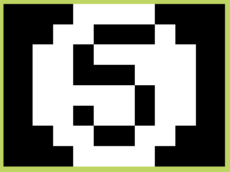
MONTY

Monty Mole is the star of the game. As moles go, he's pretty sprightly – he can fearlessly leap gaps, somersaulting as he does so. Unfortunately, poor Monty can't swim, so avoid having him take a relaxing dip during the game, because doing so will kill him to death.



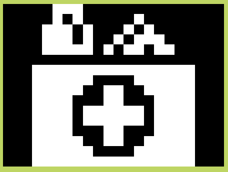
NASTIES

We're not sure what the recruitment posters for law enforcement look like round Scudmore way, but the local force seems to have cornered the market in demon cops. Monty's foes include disembodied hands, giant wasps and Slimer-like ghosts. Where's a bobby when you need one?



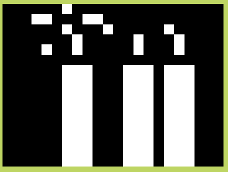
CASH

Once Monty's fled the country, he's intending to become a mole of leisure. Luckily, he has really deep pockets in his tracksuit, and people have rather carelessly left gold coins everywhere. Pick them up to boost your score – and the outlaw mammal's bank account.



BONUSES

Peppered throughout the game are a number of tempting-looking bonuses. Buns are the most common, and Monty can munch them for extra points. Elsewhere, certain objects must be collected in order for the mole to progress, such as the switch at the top of the sewerage works.

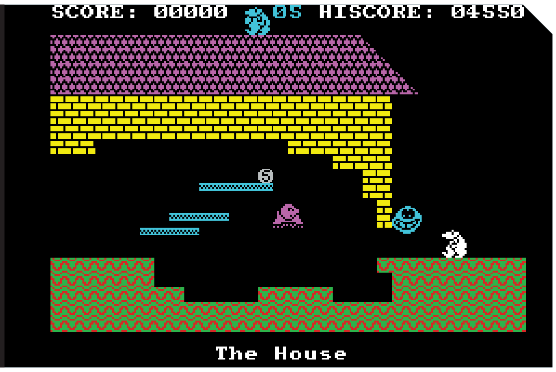


DEATH TRAPS

Unfortunately, not every shiny object in the game should be collected. Some explode on contact, which proves hazardous to Monty's health. Others cause a monster to start hunting Monty down. And whoever installed the lift in the Hall of Jow-an needs a damn good talking to…

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

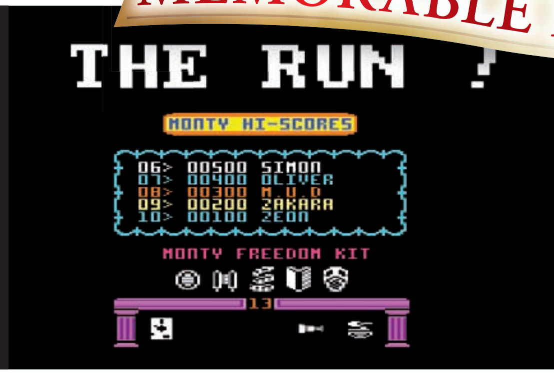
WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



Moley, moley, moley

To be fair, it's not like there was a dearth of platform games around 1985, but *Monty On The Run* nonetheless stood out. Reasonably hot on the heels of the well-liked *Wanted: Monty Mole*, *Monty On The Run* improved the formula, retaining strange foes and a tough flick-screen platform 'maze', but tightened up the controls and added a bunch of neat extras (and on the C64, you also got Rob Hubbard's fantastic soundtrack, which made it through relatively intact to the CPC release). Also, unlike the *Jet Set Willy* games, the quest seems possible rather than overwhelming.

BEST TIP

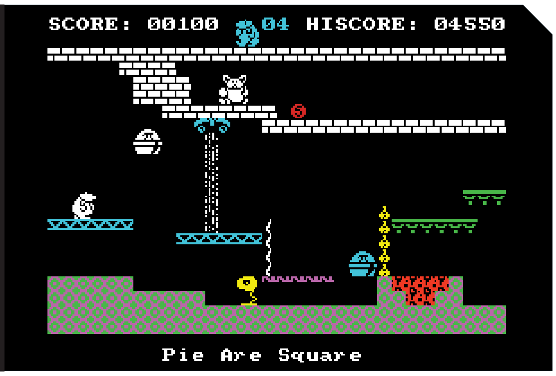


Kitted out for freedom

At the start of the game, you get the chance to select Monty's 'freedom kit' from 21 varied items. This might seem a bit of a lark, and you might like the idea of a mole wandering around armed with a floppy disk and laser gun. But there's a catch: select the wrong items and your game abruptly comes to a dead-end at a specific point, one of which is on the final screen – forget your passport and a monster blocks the final exit! So, here's a **Retro Gamer** top tip: pick the jet-pack (2), rope (4), passport (12), gas mask (13) and rum (16), or you'll be sorry.



BEST SURPRISE



Beam me up, Moley

Fans of Kirk, Spock and company will no doubt have been happy the first time they explored the house in *Monty On The Run*. Lurking in one of the rooms is a strange pulsating light beam, randomly changing colour. One colour is 'safe', while the others 'beam' Monty clear across the map – and without the safety of a generic-looking mole wearing a red jersey of death. Teleporters also show up in the sewerage works and boat, the former being a particularly nasty one that transports you deep into the enemy-infested escape tunnel if you get caught in it.

BEST MOMENT (PART ONE)



I can see my molehill from here!

Assuming you're not the kind of mole who leaves your jail cell without a trusty jetpack (and, let's face it, you have to be some kind of idiot to not realise you'll need a jetpack at some point during the average day), *Monty On The Run* takes a rather surreal turn shortly after the sewerage works. In an area dubbed 'The ULTIMATE experience' (the all-caps 'ultimate' driving home just how happy developer Peter Harrap was with this section), Monty flies about the place using his jetpack, for a short time matching the airborne manoeuvrability of his foes.

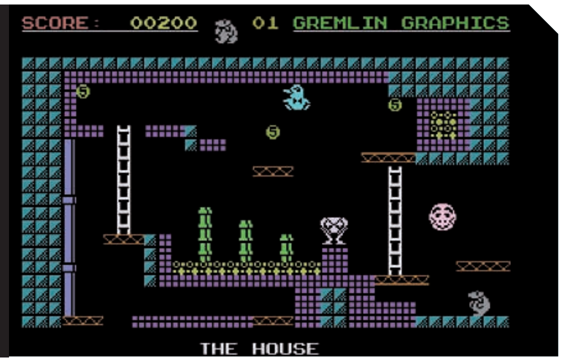
BEST MOMENT (PART TWO)



Sir Clive's (rocket-powered) C5

If a jet-packing mole isn't enough for you (what do you want? Blood?), Monty follows up his flying experience with a trip in Sir Clive's C5. Only this isn't your average battery-powered electric vehicle – this one can leap into the air, to avoid conspicuously missing chunks of road. Note that if you're playing the C64 or CPC version of the game at this point, good luck to you, because the section's about a billion times harder than it is on the Speccy – and when you die you go right back to the start. This annoyed us so much we made a real C5 out of card and stamped on it.

CRAZY CONVERSIONS



When is a mole not a mole?

Although designed for the Speccy, *Monty On The Run* found its way to other platforms. The C64 wins out, its version featuring stomping Rob Hubbard tunes and extra background graphics. The CPC omits the Speccy's monochrome graphics, instead preferring eye-searing multi-colour hell, although the game plays okay. The Plus/4 (pictured) gets a brave but cut-down game. And then there's the oddball *Monty No Doki Doki Daisassou* for the Family Computer Disk System, which uses Hubbard's soundtrack, but otherwise replaces almost element of the game – including the main character being a mole.

What the press said… ages ago

C&VG 10/10

Monty On The Run is a worthy successor to the excellent *Monty Is Innocent*. If you're a climbing game fanatic, then this is the game you should get – it's what *Jet Set Willy II* should have been. Don't let your best friend borrow it – you will never get it back!

Zzap!64 90%

The first thing that really impressed me about this game was the incredible piece of music that bursts forth once the program has loaded. Music aside, the game itself is a very good and very tough platform derivative with some excellent new touches to it.

What we think

Tough? Yes. Really tough? Most definitely. Impossibly tough? Not quite. Although Peter Harrap's game comes across as needlessly finicky at times, its fast pace and great graphics (and the soundtrack on the C64 and CPC versions) ensure it's one of the best platformers of its time and worth persevering with.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM; CONVERTED TO C64, CPC, PLUS/4, FAMILY COMPUTER DISK SYSTEM
- **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE (JALECO FOR FCD VERSION)
- **RELEASED:** 1985–1987
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+

ATARI®

The Atari 7800, once thought of as the saviour of Atari, was a victim of poor timing. Martin Goldberg reveals how it meant to launch the next generation of 8-bit consoles, but ultimately became an 'also-ran' in the post-crash era

The company responsible for the 7800's internals, General Consumer Corporation (GCC), had first come to the attention of Atari in June of 1981. *Missile Command* had been very popular on campus, until some obsessive students began scoring too well on the game. In typical smart guy hacker fashion, and long before today's common console mod kits, three MIT students decided to modify the arcade game to make it harder. Feeling a sense of entrepreneurial drive, they came up with the idea of making a standard kit out of it and selling it, giving arcade operators the ability to breathe new life into their ageing *Missile Command* machines in the form of new gameplay items and difficulty settings. So that June they started advertising, and by July Atari was already launching a lawsuit and, by August, a restraining order.

Most small companies at the time would have folded right there, but not the people at GCC. They were MIT students, after all, and had a strong sense of being smarter than the average guy. Their defence against Atari's suit would be just another interesting puzzle or challenge – things that are entertaining to them. After going several rounds with GCC in federal court, realising that it may be better to tap the talent pool at GCC than squash it, Atari's parent Warner worked out a deal in 1982 in exchange for dropping the lawsuit: GCC would design games for Atari. Atari was forced to drop its lawsuit but did so with prejudice, becoming a reluctant contractor to a company that it was just actively trying to shut down. The now-classic games *Quantum* and *Food Fight* were a result of this deal, as were several games for Atari's 2600 system. During that time, having designed a *Pac-Man* modification kit called *Crazy Otto*, GCC was able to leverage the Warner settlement to approach Bally/Midway with a bluff on the possibility of letting it officially release the game. The bluff was that it had won its lawsuit with Atari – and it worked beyond its wildest expectations. Midway was actually interested in seeing *Crazy Otto* developed into a full sequel to *Pac-Man*, and so *Ms Pac-Man* was born.

By the end of 1983, flush with cash from its growing coin-op and consumer videogame design business, GCC took on its most ambitious project yet: designing a home videogame and computing system.

With no experience in chip, console or computer design, but full of bravado from the company's successes, several GCC employees flew out to California to take a month-long crash course in VLSI (very large scale integration) chip design. The goal was to be able to design the custom chip needed to drive the company's new project, codenamed Spring. Jokingly named after the MIT 'Pre-Spring Fling' dance, it was intended to be a modular computer, IBM-compatible, and have graphics and sound capabilities to rival any upcoming computers or consoles. As former GCC employee Steve Golson put it in a 1994 interview, "Spring was going to be a home computer/game-playing machine to beat them all".

Shortly before the design and layout process, Atari had come out with its 'high-end' gaming system, the Atari 5200. GCC paid attention to how it played out, and in the fashion that had become typical of the company, thought that it could do better. "So we get one of these things, they sent it out to us, and we saw they screwed up. They screwed up in so many ways," Steve Golson also noted. Besides the controller issue and poor game library, most notably missing from the 5200 was 2600 backwards compatibility. It had been advertised the past June at the Consumer Electronics Show, but now was nowhere to be seen. Meanwhile the ColecoVision had come out, and besides enhanced graphics and great arcade ports, it offered full 2600 compatibility via an expansion peripheral. With the ColecoVision beginning to clean up, GCC thought that it had the answer. As Steve Golson put it: "We're the smart guys on the East Coast, and we're just going to save their butts." And GCC was going to have Atari release it whether it wanted it or not, because Warner superseded all management at Atari.

The pitch was for a 2600-compatible system that included souped-up graphics capability by the addition



7800


ATARI
7800
SELECT
RESET
CROSSBOW
COMMANDO
ATARI 7800 VIDEO GAME CARTRIDGE
SUPER HUEY
DESERT



Release Info

- **Year released:** 1984, 1986
- **Original price:** $150 (1984), $80 (1986)
- **Associated Magazines:** *Atari Explorer, Antic, Atarian*



of more hardware-based sprites. This soon evolved into a 2600-compatible system based around the advanced graphics chip being designed for Spring. Spring's graphics system concept was based around building up scan lines and display lists rather than bitmaps, using a process similar to Atari's 8-bit computer line and even to the 2600. For the new console, GCC thought to use double-buffered display line RAM and DMA access, something unheard of for the time in a game console. The solution for the system's 2600 compatibility was to literally include the 2600's graphics and sound chip, the TIA, on the system's main board. The inclusion of the TIA chip influenced the name of the new chip brought over from Spring – or maybe it was the past experiences of these MIT college dropouts. Regardless, the team chose to name the new chip MARIA, calling the full set on the new board TIA-MARIA after the popular Jamaican coffee liqueur. Going with Atari's now-standard approach of numbering its system names, the entire game console project itself would be called the Atari 3600.

> "We're the smart guys on the East Coast, and we're just going to save their butts"

The specs for the MARIA given to Atari were impressive to say the least: 320x240 resolution, a palette of 256 colours with 25 available per scan line, and software-based sprite generation and collision detection that could support upwards of 100 objects.

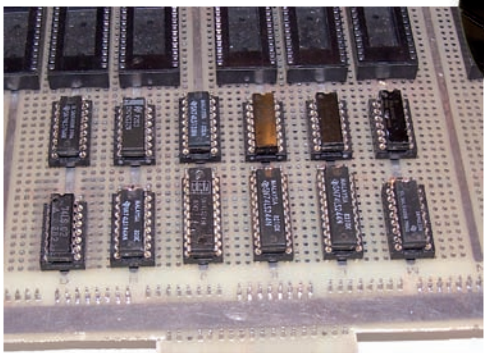
During this process, unbeknownst to GCC, the system would have its first competition with Nintendo. At the time, Nintendo had yet to release its Famicom system in Japan and was looking to find a worldwide OEM manufacturer and distributor in the guise of Atari. After a preliminary discussion between Atari's Ray Kassar and Nintendo's Minoru Arakawa and Howard Lincoln, negotiations began with Atari on 11 April when Nintendo demonstrated the prototype Famicom running an almost-complete *Donkey Kong* and *Popeye*. The offer was for Nintendo to provide 100,000 to 150,000 completely populated Famicom main boards for Atari to throw into its own consoles, all for 5,300 yen (at that time about $20) a piece. It was certainly an attractive offer, but Nintendo at this time was a nobody in the consumer market save for a few previous *Pong* console clones.

Because of the deal that Warner made with GCC, Atari was also committed to GCC's 3600 console and had to take time to evaluate the strength and weaknesses of both. GCC's MARIA chip design had started on 1 April and wouldn't be done until 1 July. The Atari project managers familiar with the MARIA specs felt that it was a superior system to the Famicom, however some of the Atari engineers appeared to be leaning towards the Famicom and strongly recommended going through with the deal. Atari wanted to stretch out negotiations until at least mid-July to have time to form a valid cross comparison and decide which one should form the internals of the 3600, but the fact that Nintendo had demanded a quick response on interest didn't help. Atari had no choice but to go through with committing to an interest or risk losing the console to a competitor. Over the next couple of months manufacturing and design considerations for the Atari version of the Famicom were discussed – including an adapter to play 2600 games. Several meetings were held as well to hash out manufacturing and supply concerns, the last of which was at the June Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago. The deal, if completed, would ultimately have Atari releasing a Nintendo-based console for that 1983 Christmas season and a total of 2 million units over the contractual period.

In the meantime, the first MARIA chip sample was returned on 1 July to GCC. Unfortunately, it found that it had a problem: the chip could display a ton of sprites, but had no time in the processor's cycles to move them. Hence the design on the MARIA 2 started, and was not completed until 17 September.

Unfortunately for Nintendo, however, by July Atari's now well-known financial problems were already in full swing. In conjunction with these problems and his stock-selling misconduct, Ray Kassar was out the door during that July. Jim Morgan was brought in right away to replace Kassar, but he wanted to take two months vacation before coming to head things up by that September. Any further talks stalled and ultimately gave GCC more time to finish the revision of the MARIA. By early September, Nintendo, Warner, and Coleco had a meeting with Warner to resolve any issues over *Donkey Kong*'s licensing, and it was assumed that negotiations would continue again for Nintendo's Famicom deal. Unfortunately, when Morgan came back, the first thing he did was freeze all projects for a month. Realising that there would be no time for a Christmas release, and compounded by rumours from people leaving Atari that the company

» A prototype Atari 7800 developer board.









» In the process of programming the 7800's version of *Robotron*.



» [Atari 7800] One of three titles from the old Nintendo licence.

may not even have the money for the deal because of its financial problems, Nintendo was unwilling to spend any more time in limbo and decided to go it alone.

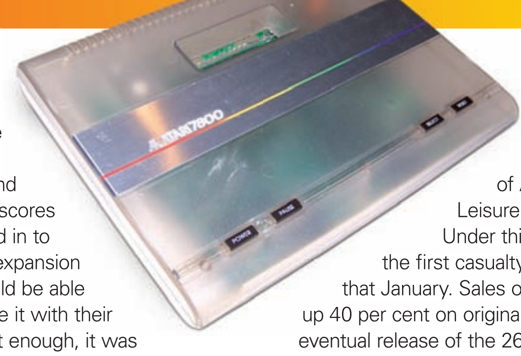
By that autumn, Morgan knew what direction he wanted to take Atari in to save it and where GCC's project fit in the scheme of things. He threw Atari's full weight behind the 3600, issuing memos that it was to supersede all product development, including Atari's own ongoing console and computer projects. This was going to be Atari's flagship console and Morgan's saviour of the consumer game console division. The target was to produce a million units for the first year and an additional 3 to 4 million in the following years.

For Atari's part, it began with leveraging some of its previous design work. The case design for the 3600 was taken from the previous design spec for the Atari 2800 – a Japanese version of the 2600. Atari's Barney Huang took the futuristic and sleek design profile of the 2800 and combined it with some of the high-end accoutrements of the 5200's case to form the 3600's outer shell. The 3600's controllers were taken from the 2600 Jr project, a highly cost-reduced version of Atari's flagship 2600 then in development. The CX24 'Super Controllers', as they were then called, were designed in a similar wedge shape to the 5200's controller, including side-mounted fire buttons on both sides. A design decision intended to alleviate a common complaint of the original 2600 joysticks by left-handed players – Atari's original solution was to show how to open up the sticks and flip the PCB around to support holding it 'lefty' – GCC would be able to utilise the extra button for more play options.

Atari and GCC also worked out a solution to a problem facing both the 2600 and 5200: anyone could code and release games for them, no licensing required, because of a previous lawsuit between Atari and Activision. This had opened up a flood of low-quality games for the console, something that Atari didn't want to see on its new high-end system. The solution was a unique and encrypted digital signature contained on all cartridges, that when not present would automatically lock the system into 2600 mode.

GCC, meanwhile, began working on some key expandability features that it wanted the 3600 to have, some of which were also influenced by its original vision for Spring. First and foremost was the computer/keyboard expansion. Everything would centre on a unique keyboard and cartridge combination that would leverage Atari's existing computer peripherals via a built-in Atari Serial I/O (SIO) port and add 16K of RAM to the system's standard 4K. The keyboard itself would be a fully functional keyboard comparable to those already used in Atari's XL line of computers, and would plug in to joystick port 2. GCC also designed an expansion port to further support its growth as a computer, with things like additional RAM expansions and a futuristic LaserDisc interface. Atari 3600-specific versions of Atari Basic and Atari's VideoWriter word processor were also developed to be bundled with the expansion, and VideoWriter was even expanded to allow joystick or trackball control for selecting and manipulating text. The computer expansion would give the buyer the ability to turn their console into a legitimate 8-bit computer comparable to Atari's existing low-end Atari 600XL.

GCC also realised that with the evolution to true arcade-quality graphics, other features such as high score saves would need to be supported. To this end,



it developed a high score expansion that plugged in to the cartridge port and would store the top five scores of any 65 games plugged in to it. Upon plugging in the expansion cartridge, the player would be able to immediately customise it with their own name. If that wasn't enough, it was even smart enough to tell your difficulty settings and have separate score charts for each setting on a game.

A funny thing happened during the months leading up to the introduction of the 3600 in May of 1984: the US videogame industry's crash began hitting its crescendo. Throughout 1983, Atari's financial problems had begun not only to become a rallying cry on the lack of investor confidence across the industry, but it showed some serious changes beginning to ripple through the market. By early 1984, both game publishers and console manufacturers were regularly announcing layoffs and closures. Atari itself suffered $539 million in losses and laid off over a third of its 10,000 employees. By January, Morgan had succeeded in eliminating 40 per cent of Atari's overhead, feeling that it was "inexcusable for a company that sells a billion dollars worth of goods not to make a profit". The overhead cuts were just the beginning, though, as Morgan sought to completely reorganise Atari's consumer division. First, he sought to improve the company's reliability image by not announcing a single product that wasn't already ready to ship, and second to cut dead weight and focus on a few profitable videogame and computer products. Morgan's new mantra for Atari was: "We're in the business of enhancing people's lives through interactive electronics."

It was a view reminiscent of Atari's original 'Innovative Leisure' logo.

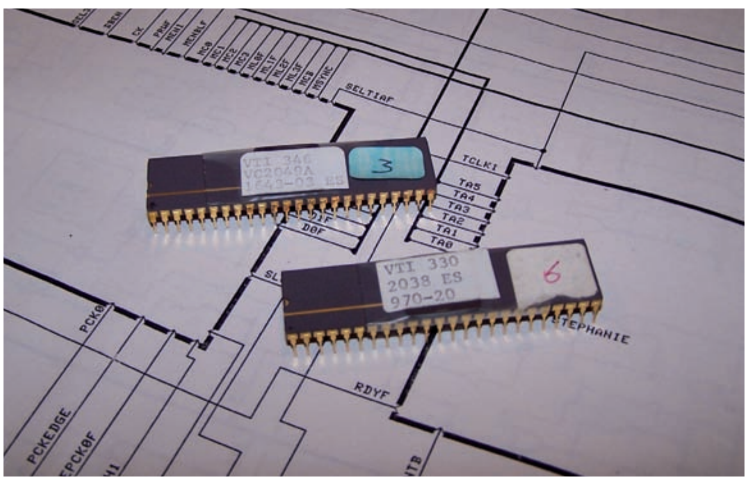
Under this new plan, the 5200 was the first casualty, with manufacturing halted that January. Sales of the 2600 were actually up 40 per cent on original forecasts, and with the eventual release of the 2600 Jr the overhead on those would be cut drastically. With the 3600 now firmly poised to be the new flagship console, it would have to venture into choppy waters – but it would do so with a new name. The 3600 designation was considered too low for a top-of-the-line console in its current number scheme, and it was decided to go with 7800 to denote 5200-style advanced graphics and 2600 backwards compatibility: 5200 + 2600 = 7800. By the time of its official introduction on 21 May 1984, its title was fully expanded to the 'Atari 7800 ProSystem', and its controllers were now referred to as Proline controllers.

A total of 14 titles were announced between May and June: *Ms Pac-Man*, *Pole Position II*, *Centipede*, *3D Asteroids*, *Joust*, *Dig Dug*, *Desert Falcon*, *Robotron*, *Galaga*, *Xevious*, *Food Fight*, *Ballblazer*, *Rescue On Fractulus!*, and *Track And Field*. Learning from its error of using *Super Breakout* as the pack-in title for the 5200's launch, Atari would be including *Pole Position II* as the pack-in for the summer launch. By September, it was to be built in to the 7800 itself.

Unfortunately, the 7800 was met with mixed opinions, many of which questioned Atari's wisdom in releasing a new console in that climate. Atari's financial problems were producing almost daily news coverage, and it was also no secret that Warner had been looking to dump the faltering Atari on someone



» GCC's MARIA chips, designed for the 7800.



» The 2600 Jr cleared the way for the 7800 to become Atari's flagship console.











Community

1. Atari Museum
www.atarimuseum.com
■ The Atari Museum, home base of the Atari Historical Society, is the premier Atari historical information and archive site. Run by noted Atari historian Curt Vendel, the site houses information and exclusive material not found anywhere else thanks to Vendel's close ties to former Atari employees.

2. AtariAge
www.atariage.com
■ If you want to find the current fan base of the 7800, you'll find it at AtariAge's bristling online community. The de facto community site for the Atari scene, you'll also find a store that supports current 7800 homebrew authors with full packaged releases of their games.

3. The Atari 7800 Page
www.atari7800.org
■ Don't let the minimalist design fool you. The site is chock full of great 7800 information. Featuring reviews, technical documents, projects, photos of the original press kits and more, this site is a true gem.

4. Dan B's Atari 7800 Tech Page
www.atarihq.com/danb/a7800.shtml
■ Besides the previously mentioned AtariAge, if you're interested in developing your own 7800 games then this is the place to start. A legend in the classic videogame homebrew hardware and software scene, Dan Boris's page focuses on all the technical information and tools that you'll need to get started.

» [Atari 7800] *Tomcat*, the F-14 fighter simulator.







else. Many news sources pondered on the likelihood of this console having any real impact as a saviour of the company. Likewise, the selection of titles was considered unflattering and already old, since many of the titles had already been released on other platforms. Undaunted, however, Atari had a very successful test run in New York in June, but it was to be a short-lived success. By 2 July it was announced that Atari's consumer division had been sold to former Commodore head Jack Tramiel.

To say things were a mess after the purchase was an understatement. Tramiel had purchased Atari Consumer for its brand name, manufacturing, distribution network, and current line-up of products. These were going to keep his new company, Atari Corporation, afloat while he worked on his next-generation computer. However, because ownership of patents, licences and products were now split between the coin-operated division – now called Atari Games – and Warner itself, it became a nightmare of litigation over the next several years. The 7800 was the first casualty of this, with Warner actually owning the console. GCC still hadn't been paid for the MARIA chip nor the launch titles that it programmed, and Warner wanted Tramiel to pay for it. Tramiel wanted Warner to pay and felt that it should have been part of the original deal, his anger apparent when an impatient employee started trying to put pressure on him to continue with the planned release of the 7800. He responded by throwing the system off his desk, firing said employee not long after. The 7800 remained in limbo until May 1985, when Tramiel finally relented and sent GCC its payment. He then began negotiating for payment on the original launch titles, which meant he had to begin looking for someone with experience in game consoles to start up a videogames division again.

That someone turned out to be Michael Katz, then head of top computer software company Epyx. Tramiel made it clear that he wanted Katz to bring back the 2600 via the cost-reduced 2600 Jr, relaunch the 7800, and develop some more timely games for it. Katz was on the job by early November, and by December they had introduced the 2600 Jr. That January at CES Atari was publicly announcing the relaunch of the 7800, and the original manufacturing run was out the door by the spring. Gone was the computer expansion and high score cartridge, however, but in place was a new-found sense of hope in the industry. In contrast to last time around, the 7800 was warmly received – as were Nintendo's NES and Sega's imminent Master System, as a sign of a reviving industry. By Christmas all three were head-to-head, but Nintendo was the clear winner by 1986, mainly due to its strong library of titles.

> "With Nintendo the clear market leader, it had a lock on the latest titles"

Where once licences were split between different platforms and a company may port titles to competing consoles, the market had changed. Much development in the arcades had switched to Japan, and with Nintendo's Famicom the clear market leader there, it had a lock on the latest titles. Publishers had to get a licence with Nintendo to release for the NES, which also barred the games from being released on other consoles. While the previous Atari had been at the top of the heap, its current form found itself with few options. Katz's solution was to use his old contacts in the computer industry to get licences to what he considered hot computer titles.

The worldwide launch occurred in 1987, and the PAL version of the 7800 ended up including the promised built-in *Asteroids*. The system's sales were respectable but still distant to Nintendo's dominance. Atari and Sega both sued Nintendo over its unfair lockout practices, but both ultimately lost due to poorly presented cases. As Katz put it: "Jack was too cheap to hire decent lawyers." With the switch to 16-bit consoles by the early Nineties, Atari shut down its entire legacy product line, including the 2600 and 7800 consoles. By the time this announcement was made in January 1992, the 7800 had sold 3,772,751 units in the US alone during its lifetime. Sadly, though, it never reached its full envisioned potential.

A special thanks to **atariage.com** for the additional images.



Perfect Ten Games



01

POLE POSITION II

» **RELEASE:** 1984

» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** STAR WARS

01 **When it was** first to be released as a pack-in in 1984, the Namco-authored and Atari-distributed *Pole Position II* was at its peak of popularity in the arcades and was a perfect introductory title to show off the system's capabilities against the likes of the ColecoVision's great port of *Turbo*. Exclusive to the Atari 7800, it's a faithful and fun port, save for the limitations of the 7800's 2600-based sound. Atari planned to allow its more-advanced POKEY sound chip to be included in cartridges to resolve this, but this game didn't get that treatment. Unfortunately, it suffered the same thing as the rest of the 7800's excellent arcade launch titles: by 1986 they were a bit outdated on the market.

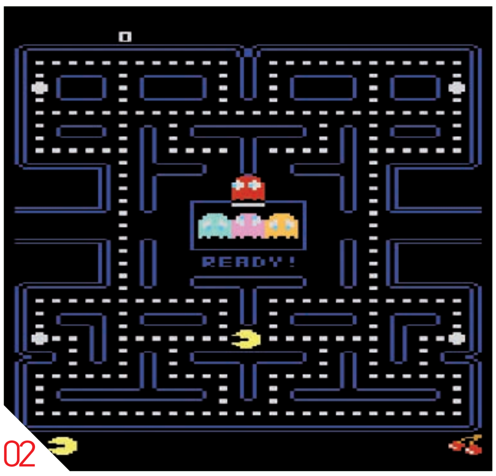
PAC-MAN COLLECTION (HOMEBREW)

» **RELEASE:** 2006

» **PUBLISHER:** BOB DECRESCENZO

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** ASTEROIDS DELUXE

02 **For years the** special software for generating each cartridge's encrypted validation key was thought lost. Then, in 2001, an Atari ST computer with the original key generation program was found, allowing a 7800 homebrew game community to sprout up once it made it into the public domain. *Pac-Man Collection* is a direct result of this, and is a must-have for any 7800 collector. Featuring near-perfect arcade ports of the original *Pac-Man* and *Ms Pac-Man*, arcade hacks like *Hangly Man* and *Pac-Attack*, the multiple maze *Ultra Pac-Man*, and even components like random mazes for *Pac-Man* and *Ms Pac-Man* makes it a formidable compilation.



02

JOUST

» **RELEASE:** 1984

» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** CENTIPEDE

03 **The 7800 received** an almost-perfect port of the early Eighties arcade favourite *Joust*. Programmed by GCC, the creator of the 7800, it pulled no stops in delivering an extremely faithful port. Even closer than the NES's 1988 release – and without that platform's addition of cheesy music – everything is there, from the actual arcade-style title screen down to the accurate sounds. An excellent play, it was yet another strong 1984 launch title that would have added to the 7800's claims of being the best, most arcade-perfect console experience on the market.

GALAGA

» **RELEASE:** 1984

» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** 720°

04 ***Galaga* received the** same treatment by GCC to produce another great arcade port and impressive launch title. Unlike the later NES port, the 7800's version has a visibly smoother motion to the sprites and really shows off the system's much-lauded multi-sprite capabilities. Beyond that, it's a trade-off between the two ports. The 7800 reproduced more of the feel and layout of the arcade version, while the NES edition changes the aspect ratio and adds a title and score area off to the side, as well as including level counter icons missing from the 7800 version.

DESERT FALCON

» **RELEASE:** 1984

» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** BATTLE ZONE

05 ***Desert Falcon* is** one of the few planned launch titles that wasn't a port. It's an original game, though done in a *Zaxxon*-style scrolling isometric format. Based around an Egyptian motif, you play a falcon that wants to fly about Egypt getting treasure and firing at bad guys. With the twist of being able to land and walk, it adds elements from another isometric arcade favourite, *Congo Bongo*. You can also collect various hieroglyphics to get power-ups, which vary depending on the combinations. You can't go wrong with this game for your collection. All in all, a great early original title.



03



04



05

The 7800's catalogue wasn't exactly bursting at the seams, but it nevertheless had plenty of desirable titles on it, especially if you loved arcade ports…



06



07



08

ALIEN BRIGADE

» **RELEASE:** 1990
» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** FATAL RUN

06 The Atari 7800's answer to *Operation Wolf*, this game is actually hard to find because of its release late in the 7800's lifetime. It's one of only four lightgun games released for the 7800, and really a lot of fun to play. A sort of primordial plot version of Atari Games' later *Area 51* release, you play a soldier battling aliens trying to take over the bodies of your fellow soldiers. Featuring higher-end graphics and gameplay, the game is also unique in that, at completion, it actually advertises – if not commands you to play – another game released at the time: *Planet Smashers*.

FOOD FIGHT

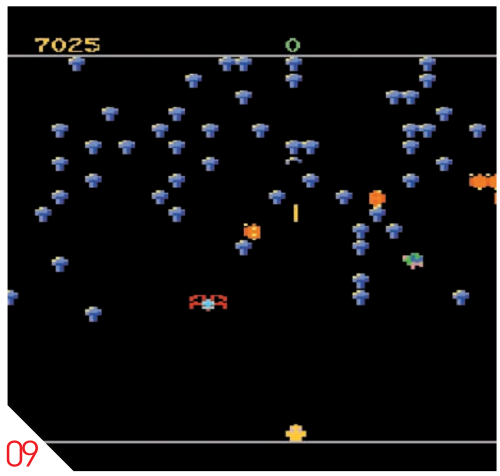
» **RELEASE:** 1984
» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** HAT TRICK

07 An excellent port of the arcade game that follows the fantasy of any kid who has seen the infamous food scene in *Animal House*, *Food Fight* lets you fight with food – *Robotron*-style. You play Charley Chuck, who instead of saving the human race is saving an ice cream from the perils of melting. Blocking your way are chefs hell bent on keeping you from your tasty treat, with your own source of protection being food that you can throw. Just as fast as *Robotron*, it shows off the 7800's capability to faithfully reproduce arcade titles compared to the other consoles on the market.

DARK CHAMBERS

» **RELEASE:** 1988
» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** KLAX

08 If *Dark Chambers* looks similar to Atari Games' *Gauntlet*, that's because it's based on its ancestor *Dandy* by John Palevich. Originally released in 1983 through the Atari Program Exchange (APX), *Dandy* was taken without the author's consent and morphed into *Gauntlet*. Palevich soon negotiated the rights to *Dandy* with Atari and continued its development on his own, but was never given credit in *Gauntlet*. However, the *Dandy* update *Dark Chambers* appeared on the 7800 and he was given full credit. And it's just as fun to play as any of the previous versions!



09

CENTIPEDE

» **RELEASE:** 1984
» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** MILLIPEDE

09 What can we say about *Centipede* that hasn't already been said? It's a classic arcade shooter that one would expect to see on an Atari console, and once again GCC did a near-perfect port. About the only thing lacking is, of course, a 7800 trackball, but the flawless motion and gameplay more than make up for the omission. This is the type of game that you think of when you think 'lots of sprites', and the 7800 handles them easily. Even the sounds are spot-on to the orginal arcade version. A superb launch title for 1984, it's also one of the few timeless early 7800 games that still held up during its relaunch a couple of years later, and it's even an excellent game today.

SPACE INVADERS (HOMEBREW)

» **RELEASE:** 2008
» **PUBLISHER:** BOB DECRESCENZO
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** SPACE DUEL

10 Unfortunately, if you wanted to play *Space Invaders* on your 7800 you were limited to the 2600 version. By 1986, Taito was already under lockout from Nintendo, whose Famicom got an updated port. While the 2600 version is respectable and still fun to play, it hardly takes advantage of the 7800's more advanced capabilities. That situation was solved by homebrew author Bob DeCrescenzo, who also brought you the *Pac-Man Collection*. *Space Invaders* for the 7800 gives you an arcade-perfect port, right down to the overlay colouring schemes of the original, and offers a multitude of 2600-esque gameplay options such as moving shields, zig-zagging lasers and invisible invaders.

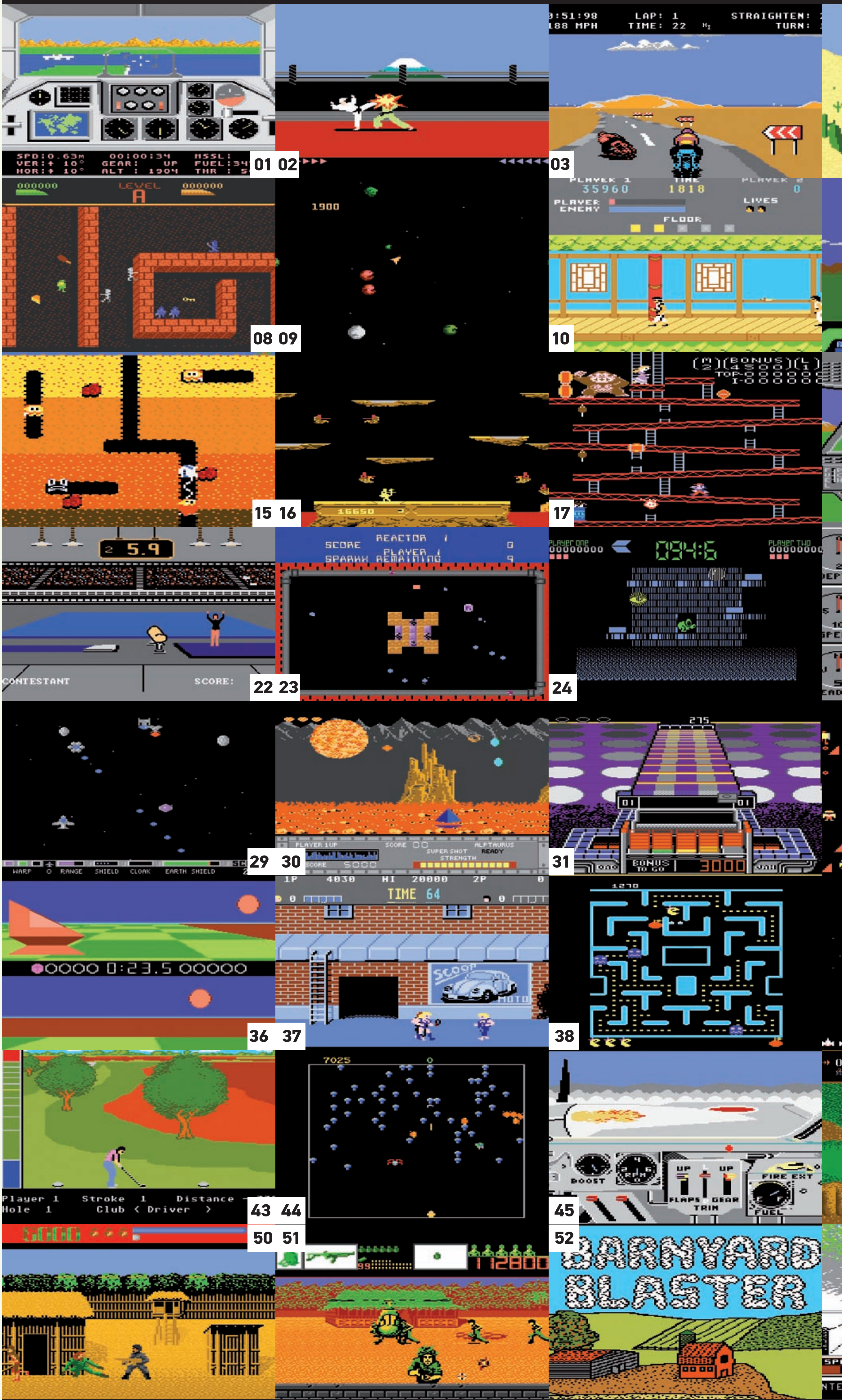


10

ATARI® 7800 and the rest…

Atari's 7800 was certainly short-lived, but it did manage to feature a solid array of arcade conversions. How many of the following titles have you played?

1 F-18 HORNET
2 KARATEKA
3 MOTOR PSYCHO
4 CROSSBOW
5 PIT FIGHTER
6 BASKETBRAWL
7 RAMPAGE
8 DARK CHAMBERS
9 ASTEROIDS
10 KUNG FU MASTER
11 FATAL RUN
12 COMBAT 1990
13 MAT MANIA CHALLENGE
14 NINJA GOLF
15 DIG DUG
16 JOUST
17 DONKEY KONG
18 SUPER HUEY
19 FIGHT NIGHT
20 IMPOSSIBLE MISSION
21 POLE POSITION II
22 SUMMER GAMES
23 MELTDOWN
24 TOWER TOPPLER
25 GATO
26 MIDNIGHT MUTANTS
27 CHOPLIFTER
28 DESERT FALCON
29 PLANET SMASHERS
30 SENTINEL
31 KLAX
32 ROBOTRON: 2084
33 FOOD FIGHT
34 SCRAPYARD DOG
35 JINKS
36 BALLBLAZER
37 DOUBLE DRAGON
38 MS PAC-MAN
39 GALAGA
40 XENOPHOBE
41 DONKEY KONG JR
42 CRACK'ED
43 MEAN 18 ULTIMATE GOLF
44 CENTIPEDE
45 ACE OF ACES
46 COMMANDO
47 MARIO BROS
48 RESCUE ON FRACTALUS!
49 HAT TRICK
50 MISSING IN ACTION
51 ALIEN BRIGADE
52 BARNYARD BLASTER
53 WINTER GAMES
54 IKARI WARRIORS
55 XEVIOUS
56 WATERSKI



Screenshots courtesy of AtariAge


04 05
06
07
HOTEL
GAME OVER
22500
11 12
13
14
SCORE 1630
HEALTH
HIGH SCORE 1630
18 19
Start Engine
CRAZY CRAVEN
DIP STICK
0000 2:51 0051
20
21
TOP SCORE 8450 8450
UNIT 66 HI
LAP 52:62
SPEED 255MPH
25 26
FUEL BATT
TORPS
SCORE
THE ULTIMATE HALLOWEEN NIGHTMARE MIDNIGHT MUTANTS
BLOOD 100% PURE
HEALTH
SCORE
27
28
VALUE= 60 10 10 10
GET 3 HIERO
32 33
WAVE
34200
35004
34
SCORE: 10125
35
SCORE: 260
39 40
600
HEALTH 220
SCORE 2440
HEALTH 300
SCORE 10
41
BONUS
42
46 47
HIGH
TOP-001610
POW
48
ALIEN KILLED
49
SAVES
TIME
COMPUTER
53 54
1 UP- 1 2800
HI-SCORE 30000
2 UP- 0
TIME
HIT
MISS
SHOTS
PULSE
1:32.3
55
3330
56
SCORE 022400
TOP SCORE 015700

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home



IN DEPTH

» Each character has two attacks: a melee attack, which chains a ferocious barrage of punches, slashes and kicks together, and a projectile weapon to keep the Aliens at bay.

» All the heroes can pick up and use any weapons they find. Be warned: seeing a Predator wield a Pulse Rifle may cause any sci-fi geek standing behind you to do a sex explosion.

» Your standard gun in the game has a self-replenishing ammo bar, a great way to keep an eye on how much ammo you have in your gun before waiting to reload.

» [Arcade] The presentation throughout *Alien vs Predator* is fantastic, and Capcom shoehorns plenty of fan service too.



ALIEN VS PREDATOR

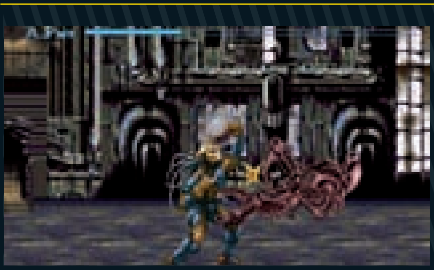
■ **Developer:** Capcom ■ **Year Released:** 1994 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **One of the twilight CPS beat-'em-ups to come from side-scrolling fighting game supremo Capcom, *Alien vs Predator* certainly ranks among the company's best, and succeeds by combining good old-fashioned fisticuffs with gratuitous violence, awesome firepower and two popular sci-fi movie licences. It basically has everything you could ever want from an *Alien vs Predator* game. How? Simple: Capcom did a great job of capturing the spirit of the films, with the game's seven stages riddled with references from either species' films.**

Fans can expect to encounter plenty of familiar Colonial Marine weapons to wield, the Power Loader, chestbursters, Alien eggs and facehuggers – even the giant APC vehicle makes a cameo, where it's used in an enjoyable set piece stage. The game's plot is also great, with Capcom putting two hardened marines beside two Predators in a mission to stop an Alien infestation devouring Earth and the shadowy corporation, Weyland-Yutani, from harvesting them for experimentation. The four heroes at your command included the muscular marine Major Schaefer, who was notable for his robotic augmentation and looking a bit like a Dolph Lundgren and Baby Commando love child; Lt Linn Kurosawa, a Jill Redfield-resembling heroine boasting ninja reflexes and attacks; and two Predators: Warrior and Hunter, with the former being less powerful but more nimble.

If there was any criticism we could level at the game, it's that it is a bit easy to finish, especially if playing through the game as either of the Predators, who, thanks to their powerful weaponry, make easy work of their interstellar rivals.

Considering how good the game is, the fact that *Alien vs Predator* never found a home release remains a mystery to all who have played this excellent game, especially considering that Capcom's similar-feeling *Punisher* arcade game, which was released a year prior, did receive a home release on the Mega Drive. We can only speculate that the interest in 32-bit polygon-pushing consoles, which arrived in Japan around the time of the game's arcade release, was likely to blame for it being forgotten about and never getting the opportunity to appear on home machines, which is a crying shame. Thanks to MAME, though, it is possible for fans to experience this unconverted classic, which, in our opinion, stands tall as one of the very best examples of a licence mash-up ever seen in a videogame.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ALIEN VS PREDATOR 1993

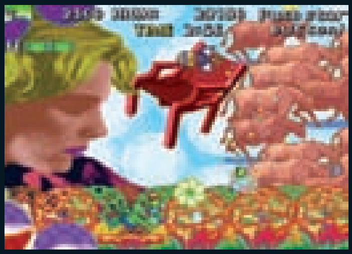
The first ever *Alien vs Predator* game was released on the Super Nintendo by Activision and sadly doesn't hold a candle to Capcom's effort. It's still the closest thing you'll find to a home conversion of the arcade game, but how anyone can make a game about two warring alien races feel bland is beyond us.

JJ SQUAWKERS

■ **Developer:** Athena ■ **Year Released:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Platformer

■ **Wow, a little-known arcade platformer from the Nineties that doesn't fall into the realms of banality.** Developed by Athena – probably best known for the *Dezaemon* series – *JJ Squawkers* is far from perfect. For one, it seems to enjoy throwing a gazillion enemies at the screen, and your hero – a stocky bird capable of throwing a random assortment of projectiles – does that annoying fall-backwards thing whenever he gets hit, often spelling instant doom if he's balancing on a platform the size of a contact lens. However, the game has a lot of heart and also this likeable Treasure quality thanks to its vibrant visuals and wacky humour. The game's creators obviously realised that they could be a bit arbitrary with their design. One of the levels, for instance, looks like a Beatles video, circa *Sgt Pepper*, and a later stage launches our hero into space, jumping between planets, stars and comets while fighting giant constellations. Odd isn't the word.



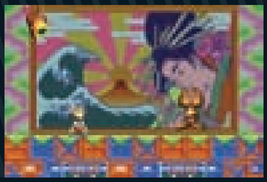


» [Arcade] The game is full of colour and imagination, giving *JJ Squawkers* a slight whiff of a Treasure title.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

DYNAMITE HEADDY 1994

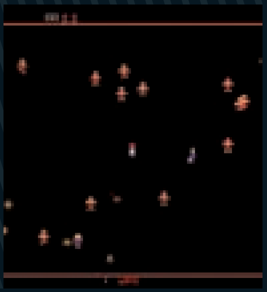
Treasure's *Dynamite Headdy* shares a few similarities with *JJ Squawkers*, notably through their lush visuals, quirky humour and imaginative level design. *Headdy* was released on all Sega platforms back in the day, and there was also rumoured to be a cancelled SNES port.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ROBOTRON: 2084 1982

With an excellent but unreleased Speccy conversion, and respectable Atari Lynx and Xbox Live Arcade ports, among others, *Robotron: 2084* is one of those rare arcade games that can boast a flawless conversion rate, and essentially plays like a more polished version of *Killer Comet*.



KILLER COMET

■ **Developer:** Centuri ■ **Year Released:** 1980 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



» [Arcade] If you like *Robotron*, then you'll likely get a kick out of *Killer Comet*. Don't hold us to that.



■ **This ancient game from Centuri is essentially *Space Invaders* spliced with *Robotron: 2084*.** You must help a little spaceship survive an inexorable swarm of aliens as they slowly make their way towards the centre of the screen. If that's not bad enough, the game occasionally throws in a glowing comet, which homes in on the ship and destroys it on contact. Thankfully, your craft is fitted with three lasers on its crest and also has a very handy warp button, which plonks the ship somewhere randomly on the screen in the blink of an eye. However, as repositioning is random, the game sometimes places your ship right in the path of a cluster of enemies, so good reactions are essential to mastering this novel little mechanic. *Killer Comet* is a neat little shoot-'em-up with some nice ideas.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

BURNING RIVAL

■ **Developer:** Sega ■ **Year Released:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **Officially the first one-on-one fighting game to come from AM2 before it reinvented the genre with *Virtua Fighter*, *Burning Rival* was a quirky brawler boasting dazzling cel-shaded anime visuals similar in style to *Arabian Fight* – another unconverted Sega fighting game from 1992, funnily enough.** Sadly, *Burning Rival*'s attention-grabbing visuals do little to hide the game's many shortcomings. Beyond that stupid title, its problem is that it features a paltry number of forgettable characters with a measly selection of moves. It also suffers from some fussy collision detection, and its fighters are afforded the tiniest of health bars, which makes the fights end quickly – not good when you're paying per fight. Oddly, though, AM2 is kind enough to give fighters the longest time limit for rounds we've encountered in a fighting game. For the curious out there it's probably worth a play, but don't expect it to hold your attention for more than a few minutes.



Shenmue

Record-breaking, technically astounding, but cripplingly expensive and still unfinished. Cole Machin asks why Shenmue continues to command such a following?



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA-AM2
- » **PLATFORM:** DREAMCAST
- » **RELEASED:** 1999
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £15

Over the years there have been many games hailed as triumphs of game engineering, as milestones of progress in the industry and as huge leaps forward in terms of depth and gameplay. Of these titles, few have encountered as many difficulties or been as beloved by its fans as *Shenmue*. Within its development, the series has outlived two consoles, racked up a monumental price tag and created a fan base that has endured nearly a decade since the last release.

As many *Shenmue* fans will already know, the series' beginnings were rooted deeply in another Sega-AM2 series, as a planned RPG expansion of the *Virtua Fighter* universe intended for the Sega Saturn; a genesis that can still be seen not only in the character modelling, but in the source code as well. The brainchild of Yu Suzuki, even in the final release of the game, Ryo's character ID remains 'AKIR', a shortened form of 'Akira'. Although it is difficult to pin down exactly when the game grew beyond these humble roots, it would certainly seem that it came late in the project's two-year-long development for the Saturn or early in the Dreamcast development. In fact, it's hard not to develop a knowing smile looking over early pictures of the character that would become Ryo while comparing them to images of Akira from *Virtua Fighter 2*. Even in the video of a development version of Saturn *Shenmue*, packaged with the Dreamcast *Shenmue II* release, the resemblance to Akira is obvious.

Despite the obvious amount of progress made during this two-year span, the writing on the wall was becoming clear for the Saturn as North American sales lagged, developers struggled with the notoriously difficult setup of the system's hardware, and support from Sega of America began to fail. Work on the Saturn version was halted; it was clear that if the *Shenmue* saga was ever going to see the light of day, it would have to be done on a different console, and Sega had just the console in mind.

Thus was the beginning of *Project Berkley*, the codename used for the early development of *Shenmue* on the still pre-launch Dreamcast. Several videos of these *Project Berkley* tech demos can still be found on the internet. It is interesting to note that the age of these demos marks *Shenmue* out as possibly one of the very first games to begin development for the Dreamcast. The *Project Berkley* moniker remained attached to the project for some time, sticking long enough to appear on the teaser disc attached to the Japanese launch release of *Virtua Fighter 3tb*. This disc was, for most, the first glimpse of AM2's new project.

Although it's tempting to blame much of the cost of *Shenmue*'s development on the difficulties encountered during the Saturn era and the shift in development from the Saturn to the Dreamcast, it would not be entirely accurate. Regardless of the change to the more coder-friendly console, the *Shenmue* project was still no laughing matter. The sheer cost of manpower and organisation for such an undertaking is immense. In fact, when we asked lead systems programmer Tak Hirai about his role in the development of *Shenmue* for the Dreamcast, he replied: "I was responsible for managing a team of 87 programmers. I also made final judgements regarding the overall program behaviour of the whole game. Managing this huge team of programmers was a nightmare since it could take more than 14 and a half hours a day just speaking with each person individually. If I only spoke with each programmer for ten minutes, you can see how it would add up."

In terms of his own programming workload alone: "I was in charge of not only constructing the coding environment but also coding a fundamental processing architecture to make system programmers easier to work with. I was also in charge of the character system, rendering pipeline, lighting engine, and also optimising the performance of these systems. I had my hands dirty on playing around with SH4 assembly [programming language] on the Dreamcast to tune up the performance. Small and detailed codes used in the cut-scenes such as physics simulation of phone cords, handcuff chains in the second chapter, and trailing visual effects of the car signals were also done in my spare time. I finally ended up creating around 200 source files out of more than 300 files in total."

To this day it's amazing that the project was completed at any cost. Although it's possible to point to other games released in the same era with a similar scope of story, we've encountered nothing on the same level in terms of the game systems. With such a large team and array of smaller projects involved, development required fantastic organisation of not only the





Who's Who

The key players in Ryo's adventure on the streets of Yokosuka

Nozomi Harasaki



Nozomi is a childhood friend of Ryo's, and the game's primary love interest and occasional damsel in distress. She's remained in Japan despite her parents' move to Canada and can usually be found working at her grandmother's flower shop. She has the largest number of unique phone conversations of any character.



Masayuki Fukuhara

Fuku-san is a former student of Iwao Hazuki and has lived in the Hazuki residence since a young age. He is often shown to be somewhat clumsy and socially bumbling, occasionally serving as comic relief. In spite of a few faux pas that make Ryo's life a little harder, he's extremely loyal and it becomes clear that Ryo thinks of him as a brother.

Gui Zhang Chen



Gui Zhang is the son and student of antiquities trader and martial arts master Chen. Although the two have a rocky beginning, Ryo and Gui Zhang form a close, if unconventional, friendship. Their evolving friendship is perhaps the strongest relationship development found in the first game.



Mark Kimberly

Mark is a co-worker of Ryo's at the harbour and the man responsible for his forklift driver's training. He has come to the harbour to search for clues as to the fate of his missing brother, leading to some very emotional scenes with Ryo. Although he is an often-overlooked character, disc three would just not have been the same without him.

Lan Di



Lan Di, the antagonist of the series, is the man responsible for the death of Iwao Hazuki and the target of Ryo's quest for vengeance. Through the course of the first *Shenmue* he is left a mysterious character. Little is known about him beyond his connection to the Chi You Men, desire for the mirrors and apparent sheer brutality.

available manpower but also of the game's program and the programming environment itself.

Hirai was kind enough to go on to explain the streamlining required: "The programming section was roughly divided into two groups. The first was the system programming team and the other was the game event programming team. In-game events in *Shenmue* were driven by the scripting language. Regarding the program interface, we defined the table of functions associated with in-game event functions so that it wouldn't affect the event program structure whenever we updated the system components. In order to maximise the performance in an environment where up to 87 programmers had to work together, we eased the workflow by downloading pre-compiled object files, which didn't depend on source code, in an individual programmer's local environment. I thought it was ridiculous for 87 programmers to spend time recompiling just because someone modified one bit of source code."

Regardless of the expense of such a development, it was necessary to realise the vision intended for *Shenmue*.

"We took tremendous efforts to implement features that were invisible to the player," continues Hirai. "If the game felt natural to you and nothing stood out as particularly unrealistic, that's because we spent a lot of time to create the game's subtle details despite the very limited hardware horsepower and technology of the time. When it comes to the weather system, it heavily depended on the processing performance, so the most important issue was to optimise the performance. Regarding non-player characters, all 300 characters were specifically positioned in the game field so we didn't have to blindly calculate the collision between



all characters if everything was in sync. However, when a non-player character had to change their walking path to avoid the player, it became increasingly harder to manage what would have been a very simple thing in the real world, such as making an off-track character stand right in front of a door."

It's difficult to explain to a modern gamer just how amazing these features were at the time of *Shenmue*'s release. We can still recall our awe, watching the fish swim in the koi pond or noticing Ryo's shadow falling in different positions depending on the time of day. Although the features may have been, as Hirai says, largely invisible to the player, they certainly did expand upon the game in truly amazing ways. Even if, unlike us, you didn't spend at least a few of Ryo's lunch breaks at work chasing birds that would scatter realistically as you charged towards them.

As the creation of the game progressed, of course some of the

» [Dreamcast] Love them or hate them, Quick-Time Events were a huge part of the *Shenmue* series.





» [Dreamcast] The variety of moves was nothing short of astounding.



Mini-games

You really can't talk about *Shenmue* without mentioning the sheer volume and playability of its mini-games. Although purpose-built mini-games such as *QTE Title* and darts were not entirely unheard of in RPGs and adventure games of the time, the inclusion of full classic arcade games such as *Space Harrier* and *Hang-On* was a unique touch. The mini-games were a big part of bringing the entire experience together, of giving you the feeling that you could do whatever you liked with Ryo's time. Throughout the existing series, we were treated to a wide variety of mini-games, including *Space Harrier*, *Hang-On*, *After Burner*, *QTE Title 1* and *2*, darts, pool, slots, *Lucky Hit* and a few variations of dice-based games. It's a selection of games that would have done early entries in the party game genre proud.



"We can still recall our awe, watching the fish in the koi pond"

features originally planned for the game did have to be scrapped, even in a game as epic as *Shenmue*. Of these features, the most talked about certainly had to be the ability to ride a bicycle, which was demonstrated in one of the early tech demos. We couldn't resist the urge to ask Hirai just why this feature didn't make the cut and what other features failed to make it into the final version that he may have liked to see on the published discs.

"Actually, I was the first guy who implemented the bike-riding feature," he explains. "This was done at the early stage of the development. We originally intended to begin the game in China, so I made it as a showcase to see how it looked when you rode the bike in a meadow. Another programmer took over that part of the project and worked on the vehicle programming at the end of *Shenmue*. I personally think that we had to cut this feature out from the game because there wasn't a significant enough advantage for the player to ride a bike through the city over simply running around in Yokosuka.

"During the development, there used to be special features, like the player being able to lift up an object like a house and throw it. Fast-forwarding or rewinding the day and night cycles worked great for debugging the game, so I wanted to leave these features in the final product as Easter eggs."

Regardless of what features failed to make an appearance in the published version, the final release suffered from no lack of things to do. Above and beyond the systems discussed earlier, the breadth of little extras is fantastic. You could choose to spend your time collecting toys, drinking sodas, buying crisps, taking care of your stray cat or playing games at the local arcade. It's a funny thing, as truly engrossing as the story of *Shenmue* is, that it is quite linear, allowing only a few hidden scenes without any true branching of the main storyline. That said, the funny thing is that we've never felt at all constrained while playing *Shenmue*, which we believe is a result of these extras. Somehow the ability to waste a day playing darts, to choose dried fish over milk to feed your cat, to satisfy your voyeurism by rummaging through Ryo's drawers, or just to give Ine-san a call during your lunch break all comes together to give you an amazing feeling of freedom. Seemingly, that was no accident.

"We created a lot of innovations never seen before *Shenmue*," says Hirai. "I would say the hardest part of this project was to imagine and create a 'you can do anything' kind of feeling, which did not exist in that era."

Shenmue's impact on the gaming industry was huge, opening a door to a new sub-genre of games that did not previously exist. Even beyond this, it opened our eyes to what could be done, and it raised the bar just a little in terms of the effort and forethought that we demand from game designers.

"I think that *Grand Theft Auto* owes *Shenmue* a lot for its great success, even after coming into the 3D realm," posits Hirai. "Everyone I've met also mentions the detail quality in *Shenmue*. I've been told: 'Don't do so much on the quality to the extent of making a cod in a pond swim smoothly.' Some even said this to me out of fear, since we might make this level of quality an industry standard! It might be simple to say it's about the quality, but I'd rather say it's about 'quality to make it feel real', which is how this project contributed to push the envelope of the gaming industry."

Often the largest impact of a project like *Shenmue* lays in what the creators

themselves take away with them, with the attitudes and ideas they carry into their future projects. As such, we couldn't help but go on and ask what effect the creation of this game had on Hirai personally and his team: "It makes me continuously think and express my thoughts as an engineer, since the project was filled with obstacles and impossible goals. The production took four whole years and I'm proud of myself as the lead programmer to have brought this game into the hands of players, even though we've now graduated through multiple generations of consoles. A lot of team members joined and left the project, and there were so many 'firsts' for us and it was very hard to see how it would all turn out, and how it would be remembered. I owe my accomplishment of four years of lead programming experience to those who worked at my side until the end of the project. Many thanks to all of the team members who supported me."

Despite any impact it may have had, the fate of the series itself was a sad one. The original release cost a colossal $70 million to produce, which is still an astronomical sum and completely unheard of at the time. Dreamcast sales were simply not high enough to support such an expensive game – if every Dreamcast owner at the time of the game's release had purchased a copy, the production would still have lost money. Sales for the original instalment were, however, reasonably strong, at over a million copies worldwide. Unfortunately, the fate of the series was tightly tied to the Dreamcast, a system that was about to run into some very serious competition from Sony's PlayStation 2. The game's release came just a few short months before the release of the PlayStation 2 in Japan, and only days after in the European and North American markets. It would only be another 16 months before the discontinuation of the Dreamcast in the North American market, which is a difficult place for a console-exclusive trilogy to find itself.

The second instalment was released for the Dreamcast in both Japan and Europe shortly before the system was killed in the European market, meeting reasonable sales. For the North American release, however, the writing was on the wall for its console of choice once again. *Shenmue* had outlived its second console. Demand for the game was still relatively high, however, with many fans importing the European release for play in North America, before the region's official release came almost a full year later for Microsoft's Xbox, which many observers consider a fatal mistake. The previous availability of the European import for the series' established fans greatly reduced the title's sales. Perhaps an even larger issue was the jump between consoles itself. At the time, the Xbox remained an expensive piece of hardware, staving off many Dreamcast owners who may have considered purchasing Microsoft's console in order to continue the series. In addition, Xbox owners who had not previously owned a Dreamcast were left



Magic Moments

Dobuita

It's hard to explain just how magical the first trip to Dobuita could feel at the time of *Shenmue*'s release. The number of unique characters, the ability to talk to them all in full audio. The freedom of being able to go to the arcade, or drop in to the Tomato Convenience Store. Being able to explore the town and its shops. It remains, to this day, one of our fondest memories of modern videogaming.



> **"If every Dreamcast owner had purchased a copy, the production would still have lost money"**



» [Dreamcast] Anyone who has played *Shenmue* is extremely familiar with this scene, and with sneaking into Dobuita the back way so you won't get harassed to buy him yet another soda.



» [Dreamcast] Ryo's morning forklift race goes a long way to both kick the day off and show just how much workplace health and safety regulations have changed over the years.

Shenmue III



Through the long years since the release of *Shenmue II*, the sizable *Shenmue* fan community has not suffered silently in its desire to see the series continued. There have been the more conventional campaigns aimed at getting Sega's attention, including mass mailings of letters, an online petition that has earned over 60,000 signatures, and general forum griping. There have also been some very inventive and interesting campaigns, such as the mass mailing of toy capsules to Sega's offices.

The *Shenmue* community has managed to keep itself busy with other pursuits as well. Shenmue Dojo (**www.shenmuedojo.net**) has been the most prolific in its modding and exploration of the two existing games. If you've ever wanted to see Lan Di sobbing on a park bench or learn all about the character modelling, then it's certainly the place for you. Mind you, if you want to ask a question, you just might want to use the search feature, as with seven years of posts available, numbering almost half a million, most of the newbie questions that could be asked have been answered.

Flashbacks

By killing off Iwao Hazuki in the opening moments of the game, the story writers were left in the difficult position of making you truly care about his death retroactively. It was done predominantly with sepia-tinged flashbacks, building his character in the early stages of the game, and it certainly worked. You'd need a heart of stone to sit through Iwao's training and feel nothing.





Lost brother

Mark's quest to discover the fate of his lost brother provided more than one great moment in the latter part of *Shenmue*. This scene stands out as the best example. It's hard not to let your heart go out to the fellow as he begins to open up to Ryo regarding his suspicions and fears.

Nozomi in the park

We never fully understood why it was that Nozomi chose to finally tell Ryo about her feelings for him until shortly after the death of his father – it just seems like bad timing. Regardless, by the time you reach this point, you're likely pretty invested in the romantic subplot between the two. It's one of the rare points of the series where you wish that you had just a little more control over what Ryo says.





Sail away

It may be a little obvious, but it's hard to discount *Shenmue*'s final scene when discussing the game's magic moments. It's impossible to stay as implacably stoic as Ryo himself as he sails away from everyone in his life, from everything he knows, to continue his quest.

with the second instalment of a story-driven game – a title that picks up in the middle of a story they have not become attached to. All of these factors came together to form a death sentence. Sales were dismal.

Any possible third entry was left in a nearly impossible condition. It had no console and, in the minds of the executives, no market. To continue the series, much of the initial cost and time spent on character modelling and environment building would need to be abandoned and re-created, making any possible climb to profitability for the series a steep and difficult one. Due to the sudden cancellation of the series, conjecture has been widespread for years as to what state the third in the series was left, with some even maintaining that a playable build exists somewhere, however unlikely this may be. It was clear that the Dreamcast would not be continuing far into the future during the production of the second game; Sega had no intentions of building another console to shift development to, even if it felt that it could be made profitable.

All of this logic, however, couldn't kill all hope of playing out just a little more of the *Shenmue* story. We had to ask Hirai if he was aware of any development on a third instalment in any form. This was all he had to say on the subject: "There was none that I know of, but I personally would love to see this saga continued."

Although there have been several fan-based campaigns for a third *Shenmue*, Sega has been stoic regarding the possibility of a third entry, often citing the poor sales of *Shenmue II*, and Sega officials have been clear that there are currently no plans to continue the series. Regardless of official word, there have been several hoaxes over the years regarding pending announcements from Sega, some of which have included footage from an ill-fated tie-in called *Shenmue Online*: a massively multiplayer conceptualisation of the *Shenmue* universe publicly announced in 2004 as a joint venture between Sega and JC Entertainment.

Development work on *Shenmue Online* ran into difficulties a year after its announcement when JC Entertainment withdrew from the project. Due to the nature of the joint development agreement, it became unclear as to who would continue to hold the rights to the *Shenmue Online* concept. Seemingly, Sega did continue production on the title for some time after the split, but little to nothing has been heard about the project for several years. Although it has never been officially announced that development has been cancelled, it seems unlikely that the game will ever see the light of day.

In the face of these cancellations and years of delay, *Shenmue* fans were handed some hope recently when Sega announced the inclusion of Ryo Hazuki in the kart-racing title *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing*, a decision made by Sumo Digital that garnered much attention. Sega itself made use of this inclusion to market the game, teasing Ryo's inclusion as well as holding a raffle for limited edition Ryo Hazuki figurines, bringing the series more attention than it has received in many years and fuelling the hopes of those who wish to see it continued.

» [Dreamcast] Although many gamers preferred the Free Battle system, the QTE fights could be quite cinematic.





» [Dreamcast] The rumours about what happens when you swallow watermelon seeds are true, apparently.



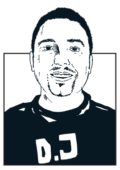
Thanks to Tak Hirai, James Mielke and all the folks at Q Entertainment for taking time to make our interview possible and to circumvent any language barrier between us.



Repton

A CLONE, ONLY NOT

RETROREVIVAL



» BBC MICRO
» SUPERIOR SOFTWARE
» 1985

On first look, *Repton* appears to be nothing more than a *Boulderdash* clone. Of course first appearances can be deceptive, and once you play Tim Tyler's excellent game, you'll discover it to be a completely different beast to First Software's massively popular game.

Of course, similarities certainly exist – you dig around in an underground maze seeking out crystals while avoiding boulders – but the pace to *Repton* is a world away from the frenzied gameplay of *Boulderdash*. Rushing in *Repton* only leads to disaster, with the titular lizard having far more success if he's slowly guided around the cleverly designed mazes. This is further backed up by the fact you have far more time than you do in *Boulderdash* – First Software's game has an on-screen timer that greatly accelerates your need to finish each stage as quickly as possible – allowing *Repton* to almost casually explore each stage.

Then of course there is *Repton* himself, a delightful lizard who quickly morphed into the Beeb's unofficial mascot. Large of size and nicely animated, he's a great creation who you quickly bond with, such is your desperation to clear each and every cavern that the poor lizard finds himself trapped in.

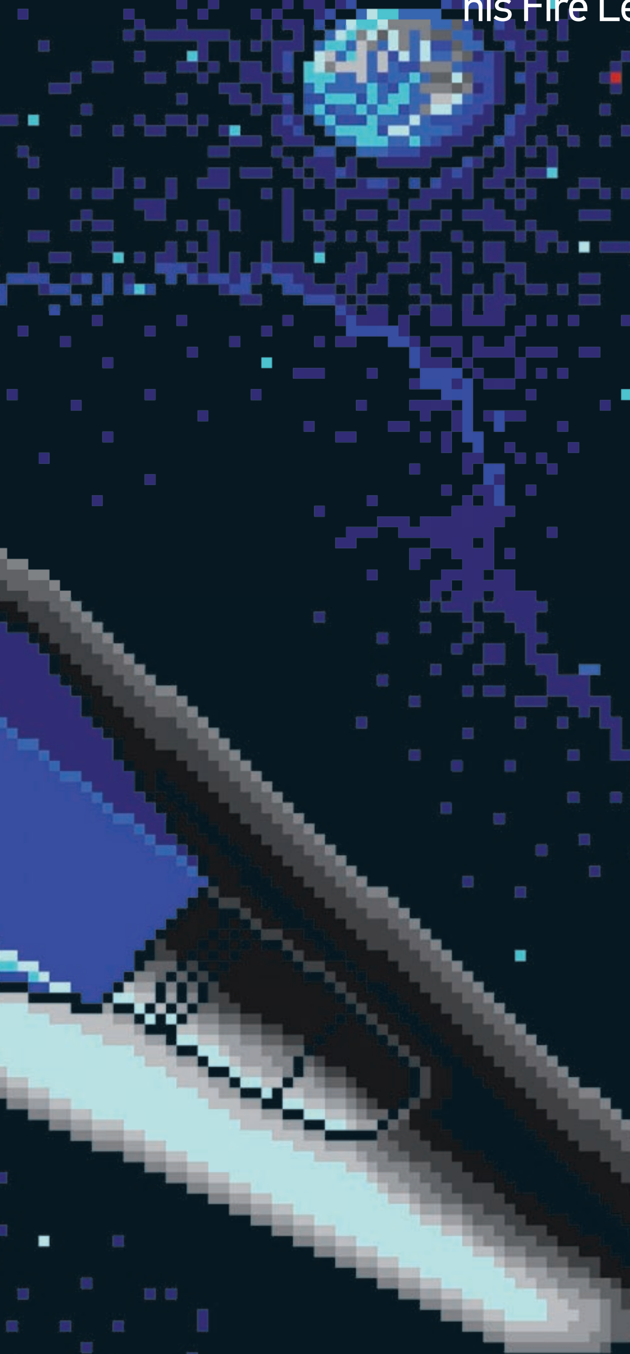
With its decent presentation, huge sprites, bright primary colours and slick programming, it should come as no surprise to learn that *Repton* was a huge success for both Superior Software and the then 15-year-old Tyler, and it soon went on to spawn numerous sequels, although Tyler only programmed the direct sequel and not any of the later games.

For a 27-year-old lizard, *Repton* has proven extremely versatile and has been able to adapt to a variety of different consoles and computers. He can currently be found on Apple's iPhone, but if you want to view this rare creature in his natural habitat then we suggest you hunt down a BBC Micro and relive his original adventure all over again. You can thank us later. *



FEEL THE THUNDER

Thanks to a recent outing on the PS2, Thunder Force is once again in favour, offering the perfect excuse for Damien McFerran to hop into his Fire Leo space fighter and chart the history of this classic series



Although SNES fans will insist that Nintendo's 16-bit powerhouse had a more diverse range of software when compared to its bitter rival the Mega Drive, one genre in which it simply couldn't compete was the 2D shooter. Sega's console was flooded with top-notch arcade blasters, and one series that is particularly worthy of praise is Technosoft's legendary *Thunder Force*. Despite not being a first-party Sega release, the franchise would become almost synonymous with the Mega Drive and was responsible for converting a great many gamers to the platform.

However, prior to the eyeball-searing visual excesses of the Mega Drive instalments, *Thunder Force* established itself in the rather more mundane arena of Japanese personal computers. "Before they started developing for consoles, Technosoft primarily created software for the various Japanese home computer systems such as the Sharp X1 and the NEC PC range, and the original *Thunder Force* was one of these games," explains shooter enthusiast Paul Brownlee.

Surprisingly, this debut title showcased very few of the features that would make the franchise so beloved with shooter fanatics. In fact, the gameplay was viewed from a top-down perspective and was very different from what would follow later. "You fly over different landscapes armed with an airborne shot to attack flying enemies and a ground bomb to destroy structures," Brownlee explains. This mechanic made the game a very close match to the coin-op hit *Xevious*, which has led many to surmise that Technosoft was heavily inspired by Namco's title. Because the game was designed for Japanese computers, few Western gamers have had the opportunity to sample it. "I've only seen the Sharp X1 version first-hand, but it was released on other computer formats, such as the Fujitsu FM-7 and NEC PC-9801," says Brownlee. "The visuals and features between each version depended on the power of the hardware. After the initial release of the game, Technosoft also released a *Thunder Force* construction kit, which let you create your own stages."

It was hardly the most inspiring start for the series, but *Thunder Force* nevertheless found an audience among action-starved Japanese PC owners. It wasn't until the inception of the sequel – which was programmed for the Sharp X68000 personal computer in 1988 and converted to Sega's newly launched Mega Drive console the following year – that Technosoft's most famous brand got a release outside Japan. However, while the second title may be notable for bringing the name to Western audiences, it isn't viewed as kindly as its successors, largely due to the fact that it mixed brand-new side-scrolling levels with the overhead stages found in the original release.

"Most of the complaints about *Thunder Force II* come from top-down stages, while the side-scrolling levels tend to be viewed in a more positive light," says Brownlee. "It's not commonly known, but *Thunder Force II* was developed for the X68000 first and converted to the Mega Drive afterwards. The Sega edition lacks several features present in the original. For the top-down stages there was a handy map, which would show the approximate location of the enemy bases. It also had extra stages, which were removed from the Mega Drive port. Other things present in the X68000 version were an extended intro sequence with a narrative, some extra graphical effects, different weapons, better music and much clearer voice samples – amusingly, the game blurts out an expletive when you lose your last life, as if the game knows what's on the tip of your tongue when it happens."

Despite the criticism directed at the top-down levels, *Thunder Force II* still managed to find favour with many Sega players, thus encouraging Technosoft to expand the series further. For the third title, the company wisely decided to focus solely on the much-loved side-scrolling viewpoint and abandon the overhead perspective altogether. This savvy move – combined with some astonishing visual tricks and suitably hectic gameplay – would result in one of the most significant Mega Drive games of the early Nineties.

"At the time of *Thunder Force III*'s release in 1990, the Mega Drive was just starting to pick up its stride and showcase itself as markedly superior

timeline



THUNDER FORCE

(1983 – Sharp X1, NEC PC, Fujitsu FM-7)

■ Featuring a top-down perspective as opposed to the side-scrolling view that has made the series so famous, the original *Thunder Force* was confined to Japanese personal computers and never saw release outside its native country. For the time, it was a stunningly playable achievement.



THUNDER FORCE II

(1988 – Sharp X68000, Sega Mega Drive)

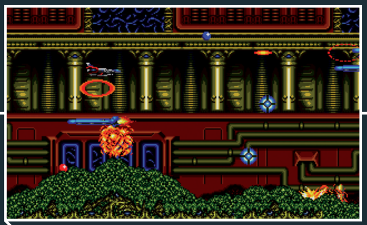
■ This sequel marked the first time the series had made it outside Japan, and the Mega Drive port was one of the platform's first shooters. It's not a particularly auspicious global debut for the franchise but *Thunder Force II* would lay down the foundations for future instalments.



THUNDER FORCE III

(1990 – Sega Mega Drive)

■ Released early in the life of Sega's 16-bit console, *Thunder Force III* was a massive step up from its predecessor and turned heads like no other game of its era. The astonishing visuals and gloriously rocking soundtrack made a massive impression and helped sell systems by the bucket load.

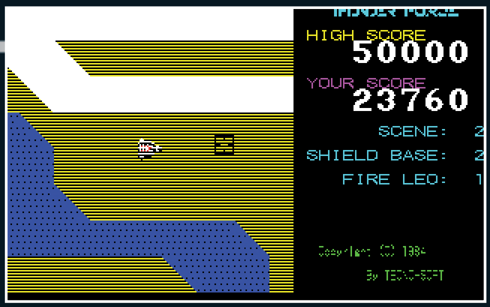


THUNDER FORCE AC

(1990 – Arcade)

■ Running on Sega's System C-2 arcade hardware, this is essentially a re-imagining of the Mega Drive *Thunder Force III*. Certain elements of the game were redone – including the introduction of themes seen in *Thunder Force II*. The game was later ported to the SNES as *Thunder Spirits*.





» [Sharp X1] Released in 1983, the original *Thunder Force* looks predictably rough by today's standards.

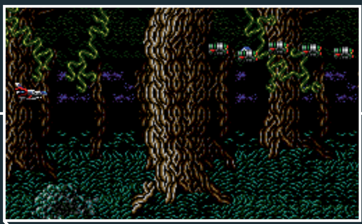
to the NES, Master System, or any other last-gen console," Brownlee recalls. "People were overawed by the famous wavy fire background effect of the lava level; its fluidity was unlike anything they had ever seen up until that point. It also had the benefit of being released around the peak of shooter popularity. At that time people were much more receptive to the genre." *Thunder Force III* was also responsible for establishing the reputation of the series for awesome chip-tune rock soundtracks; the intense background music was the perfect companion to the dazzling on-screen action.

Thunder Force III was so successful that it warranted an arcade port – which is strange when you consider that most shooter franchises tend to go in the opposite direction. "*Thunder Force AC* is essentially the same game as *Thunder Force III* but with a few changes," Brownlee explains. "*Thunder Force AC* was ported to the Super Nintendo as *Thunder Spirits*, which again was mostly the same but had some slight alterations from its arcade counterpart. In particular, the battleship stage is completely different, and a portion of the final stage where you fight the last boss has been tinkered with slightly." The SNES has a poor reputation for shooters due to its slow CPU, and *Thunder Spirits* predictably suffered from crippling bouts of slowdown.

After the insane graphics of the third entry, many fans believed that they had witnessed the zenith of the genre, but Technosoft would blow away its followers with the next entry. "*Thunder Force IV* is one of those games where every aspect comes together perfectly to deliver something extraordinary," gushes Brownlee, leaving little doubt as to which entry in the franchise is his personal favourite. "I think this game is the best at demonstrating how much Technosoft mastered the Mega Drive hardware; it was really the platform on which they peaked. The quality of the graphics is immediately apparent from the first stage, where you can see the multi-parallax scrolling effect in the water and the landscape in the background. You can scroll vertically across two screen lengths for the first stage and several of the others, which makes the playing field seem open and gives things a greater sense of scale. Of course, you can't really talk about *Thunder Force IV* without mentioning its music. Technosoft games have a reputation for good tunes, and the company was extremely skilled at making the Mega Drive sound chip produce brilliant melodies, despite it being seen as inferior to the Super Nintendo's sound hardware. Again, this is the game that demonstrates Technosoft's prowess the most, as many people remain impressed with the soundtrack from not only a musical standpoint, but from a technical one as well." However, despite the incredible achievements made in the game, Brownlee thinks that the perfectly balanced challenge was arguably just as significant in making it such a success. "Most *Thunder Force* games tend to be on the easy side," he says. "However, in the fourth game the default difficulty is challenging but not overly difficult. On that note, the bosses in *Thunder Force* games have a bad habit of being pushovers, appearing as intimidating threats in their intros, only to go down after a few shots in an anticlimactic fashion. Refreshingly, most *Thunder Force IV* bosses are an exception to this rule and will not only put up a fight but take a good amount of punishment. Finally, I love how they give you a devastating new toy to play with halfway through in the form of the powerful Thunder Sword, because it reinvigorates your interest."

> **"Thunder Force III got an arcade port, while most shooters go in the opposite direction"**

The series then endured a relatively prolonged absence following the fourth instalment; hardcore fans would have to wait five agonisingly long years before the next release. To keep them sated Technosoft released the *Thunder Force Gold Packs* on the Sega Saturn, which featured ports of the original games. "The *Gold Packs* were released in the mid-Nineties to drum up interest for the incoming *Thunder Force V*," explains Brownlee. "*Gold Pack 1* contains the Mega Drive port of *Thunder Force II* and *Thunder Force III*, while *Gold Pack 2* contains *Thunder Force IV* and *Thunder Force AC*. Notably, the version of *Thunder Force IV*



Thunder Spirits
(1991 – Super Nintendo)
■ Just as *Thunder Force AC* was a retooling of *Thunder Force III*, *Thunder Spirits* took the template laid down in the arcade title and tinkered with it slightly. The ability to select which order you tackle the levels has been removed and there are differences in level design.



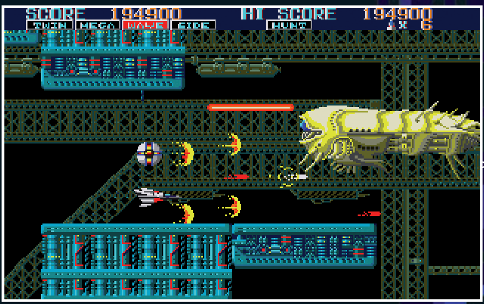
Thunder Force IV
(1992 – Sega Mega Drive)
■ Arguably the apex of the entire franchise, *Thunder Force IV* (or '*Lightening Force*' [sic] as it was clumsily renamed in the US) shows Technosoft firing on all cylinders. The graphics are incredible, the music is some of the best ever produced on the Mega Drive, and the challenge is stern but fair.



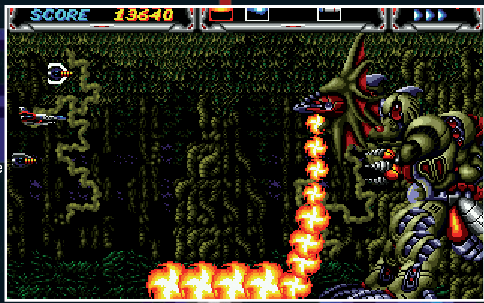
Thunder Force V
(1997 – Sega Saturn, Sony PlayStation)
■ The 3D visuals look rough by today's standards and the gameplay isn't quite as polished as it is in *Thunder Force IV*, but there's still an awful lot to like about the fifth main entry in the series. The music is especially good, benefiting hugely from the move to CD storage.



Thunder Force VI
(2008 - Sony PlayStation 2)
■ The most recent instalment is a rather mixed bag, having been programmed almost entirely by Sega and not Technosoft, as the latter no longer exists. A Japan-only release has ensured that this blaster isn't going to be witnessed by many outside the dedicated series fans, sadly.



» [Mega Drive] The second game mixed side-scrolling and overhead perspectives, with the latter being frowned upon by most players.



» [Mega Drive] *Thunder Force III* was an amazing graphical achievement for 1990 and convinced many gamers to purchase Sega's new hardware.

in *Gold Pack 2* is slightly improved over the original as it eliminates the slowdown and contains an added Easter egg that lets you play as *Thunder Force III*'s Fire Leo-03 Styx fighter."

As welcome as these retro-themed collections were, it was clear that they were merely the appetiser for what was to come. *Thunder Force V* was released on the Saturn, followed a year later by a port on the PlayStation, and would drag the brand into 3D, with mixed results. "The graphics seem to have been more impressive at the time of its release, but like many pioneering 3D games of that era, they certainly haven't aged gracefully," admits Brownlee. "I think it's a solid entry into the series, but it seems like a step down from *Thunder Force IV* and feels very close to the third game. It does a pretty good job of making things seem fast and exciting and has some sleek mechanical designs with the ships and bosses. Another big plus is the music; even today, the soundtrack is a shining example of great synth rock."

The fifth entry was significant in other ways, too. It incorporated massive changes in the weapons system. "*Thunder Force V* introduces the 'Over Weapon' system, which is kind of an expanded concept from the Thunder Sword in *Thunder Force IV*. In order to utilise these weapons you need to collect up to three energy satellites that rotate around your ship; each one acts as a power battery for the Over Weapon, in addition to enhancing your current weapon. As you use the Over Weapon, the satellites will drain until they reach a weakened state. In order to keep using your Over Weapon you either have to wait for the satellites to replenish over a short period of time or replace them with new satellites. Once weakened, the satellites will be destroyed if they are hit by enemy fire. Each weapon in the game has a more powerful Over Weapon version that you can use at will as long as you fulfil the previous requirements."

Although the PlayStation version of *Thunder Force V* was released after the Saturn edition and contained bonus features, it isn't considered to be the superior of the two by many fans. "The Saturn version contains some graphical effects that weren't possible to reproduce on the PlayStation and ends up being the better-looking of the two," explains Brownlee. "The Sony version can be seen as a 'director's cut', as it expands upon the original Saturn release with some in-game extras. Among them are added CGI sequences, a picture gallery, boss rush mode, hidden selectable variations of the main ship with different gameplay-changing attributes, and other minor touches. The core gameplay differences between the two are relatively minor, reduced to scoring and slowdown instances. Arguing over which one is superior has become an intense discussion among fans."

Although they didn't know it at the time, these very same fans would have to wait almost a decade before they would play another *Thunder Force* title. Technosoft's fortunes took a nosedive around this time and development on the sixth game, which was supposed to be coming to Sega's newly launched Dreamcast, was canned when the firm was sold and effectively disbanded in 2001. However, during these wilderness years a few events kept the magic of the brand alive.

POWER-UP!

Thunder Force is known for its power-ups, but the competition has plenty to offer



■ **Hunter (Thunder Force)**
Arguably the trademark weapon of the entire *Thunder Force* series, the Hunter locks on to enemy units and blasts them out of the sky, leaving the player free to focus on negotiating around unfriendly fire. However, the ability to aim is removed so careful positioning of your ship is paramount.



■ **Force (R-Type)**
Quite possibly the greatest power-up of all time, the Force is an indestructible pod that bolts to the front or back of the iconic R-9 craft. The player can fire the orb at enemies to inflict massive damage, but doing so leaves the fragile fighter exposed to enemy bullets.



■ **Option (Gradius)**
One of the more useful power-ups in *Gradius*, the Option pod dutifully follows behind the Vic Viper and doubles the amount of damage that the player can inflict. You can collect more Option pods to gain additional firepower, and in *Gradius V* it's even possible to influence their aim.



■ **Radiant Sword (Radiant Silvergun)**
Not strictly a power-up as *Radiant Silvergun* gives you a full armoury of weapons from the outset, but the Radiant Sword is worth a mention regardless. Once your gauge is full you can unleash a devastating full-frontal attack to obliterate any foes in your vicinity.



■ **Beam Cannon (Musha Aleste)**
Once bolted on to the back of the player's robotic Aleste fighter, the Beam Cannon pod produces a powerful torrent of laser energy, which can be increased by collecting further pod power-ups. At its most potent setting it makes short work of enemy units.

"After the sale of Technosoft the music composer for *Thunder Force V* released an album entitled *Broken Thunder: Noise Image Soundtrack Vol 3* that featured some music that was intended to be used in the cancelled *Thunder Force VI*," says Brownlee. "He later re-released the music along with some past *Thunder Force* arrangement tracks under the music group he was part of at the time with the name *Broken Thunder: Project Thunder Force VI*. All of this culminated in the group making their own fan-created *Thunder Force* sequel called *Broken Thunder*. Unfortunately for them, this unofficial sequel didn't go over too well at release and was mocked for being of poor quality, and this ultimately caused the group to dissolve."

While that attempt at keeping the series afloat might have been unsuccessful, *Thunder Force* managed to score a cameo role in what must rank as one of the most bizarre and downright brilliant Dreamcast games of all time: *Segagaga*. A Japan-only release that saw the player controlling the fortunes of Sega's development division, the game boasted a level that paid homage to Technosoft's seminal series. "The very last stage of *Segagaga* is a shooter sequence similar to *Thunder Force* where the boss takes the form of different Sega consoles," explains Brownlee. "Some of the background music can be heard in the *Broken Thunder* albums and there are a few other extra *Thunder Force*-related Easter eggs in the game itself, including the CG video intro to the cancelled *Thunder Force VI*. Apparently, *Segagaga* director Tetsu Okano was a big fan and was able to sneak all of this stuff in."

Okano's ability to cram these references into his game set the wheels in motion for a proper sequel, which would appear on the PlayStation 2 in 2008, with Sega handling both the development and publishing duties. The Technosoft moniker appeared prominently on the packaging, but the company itself no longer existed. "After Technosoft was bought out and incorporated into Twenty-One Company – which manufactures pachinko units – most of its developers moved on," says Brownlee. "The company web page remained stagnant for several years until it suddenly and quietly announced the return of the *Thunder Force* series. Shortly after, it was discovered that Twenty-One Company had licensed the name to Sega because Okano was interested in making a



» Like all good shooter franchises, *Thunder Force* has been immortalised in the form of plastic model kits.

ROLL CALL

Thunder Force's Fire Leo is one of a host of iconic space fighters from shmup history



R-9A ARROWHEAD

(R-Type)

One of the most famous shooter ships of all time, the R-9's distinctive round canopy has made it familiar to millions of gamers all over the globe. Tasked with single-handedly preventing the advance of the evil Bydo Empire, the R-9 uses the powerful Force module to get the job done.



FIRE LEO

(Thunder Force)

The main star fighter of the *Thunder Force* series, the Fire Leo has undergone several revisions over time, including the Exceliza (*TF II*), Styx (*TF III*) and Rynex (*TF IV*). Powerful and incredibly manoeuvrable, the ship is the only craft capable of defeating the malevolent ORN Empire.



ZIG

(Zero Wing)

Toaplan's side-scrolling shooter may be more famous for inciting the infamous 'all your base are belong to us' internet craze than its enjoyable gameplay but it also boasts a particularly useful ship in the shape of the ZIG. The ability to grab enemies and use them as a shield is innovative.



VIC VIPER

(Gradius)

Second only to *R-Type*'s R-9 craft when it comes to enduring fame, the curiously named Vic Viper has starred in numerous instalments of Konami's most beloved shooter series. Revisions of the basic ship include Lord British, Metalion, Thrasher, Vixen, Alpinia, Jade Knight and Falchion Bet.



BLASTER-1

(Aero Blasters)

Just one of two fighter craft operated by the awesome-sounding Trouble Speciality Raid Unit, Blaster-1 resembles a traditional supersonic fighter jet but houses a dazzling array of power-ups and weaponry. It's also just as much at home flying through space as it is in the Earth's atmosphere.



RAIDEN SUPERSONIC ATTACK FIGHTER

(Raiden)

With its signature red paintwork and fearsome arsenal, it's little wonder that the Raiden fighter is such a feared craft. The Vulcan cannon is capable of filling the screen with shrapnel, and the trademark laser attack is the perfect icebreaker.



D117B AXELAY

(Axelay)

Yet another ship unfortunate enough to be expected to defeat an armada on its own, the D117B comes equipped with missiles, machine guns and powerful blasters. It's also a tough little customer; when it takes a hit it merely loses a weapon, although once they're all gone it's game over.



CNCS1

(Hellfire)

Available in white with optional go-faster stripes, this experimental attack craft boasts multi-directional weaponry and the astonishingly powerful 'Hellfire' weapon. Collecting additional power-ups alters the appearance, and it's also possible to add side pods to really impress the ladies.



SILVERGUN PROTOTYPE

(Radiant Silvergun)

The Silvergun Prototype is unique in that it doesn't require external power-up weapons in order to function; as the player battles enemies the weapons increase in strength, just as they would in an RPG. It's possible to access seven different weapons right from the outset of the game.

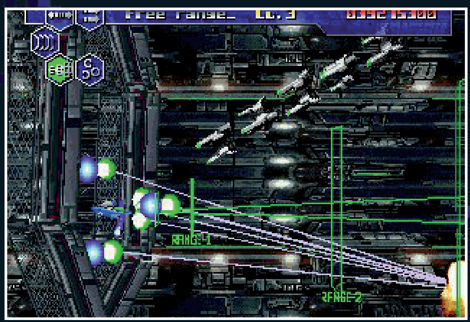


SILVER HAWK

(Darius)

It may be the same shape as a bird but this curiously elegant ship has proven to be something of a fan favourite since the release of *Darius* way back in 1986. Available in two colours, the Silver Hawk has managed to overcome its awkward appearance and kick serious alien butt.





» [PlayStation] The 32-bit era saw the release of *Thunder Force V*, an attempt at updating the classic formula.









“Unless some major outside force gets involved, the outlook isn’t positive”

sequel for the PlayStation 2.” Despite the initial excitement, many fans feel that this follow-up fails to fully capture the essence of the series. “It’s not terrible, but I can’t help but feel a little disappointed with it myself,” admits Brownlee. “The obvious thing is that it’s technically a Sega game and not a Technosoft title. One issue is that it’s over with too quickly; the first few stages come and go before you realise it. Another problem is that your arsenal is overpowered and the opposition just doesn’t seem to pose any threat because of it. Two out of the three ships start off fully powered-up and don’t lose any of their potency upon death, so there’s little risk involved. I think this lack of penalty takes away a fundamental aspect of playing a *Thunder Force* game: taking care when switching between your weapons so that you don’t lose them in error. All of this results in a game that is very easy to finish on default, but makes the experience lacklustre since there’s no urgency or passion involved. I do feel it was too focused on paying homage to previous *Thunder Force* games and didn’t really bring enough to the table to carve out its own unique place in the lineage.”

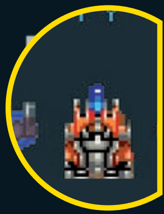
Despite these issues, Sega’s experiment with resurrecting the classic name has certainly stirred the hearts of fans worldwide – but does this mean there’s now a future for the franchise? “Unless some major outside force like Okano gets involved or Technosoft manages to reinvent itself, the outlook isn’t positive,” says Brownlee sadly. “The small market presence left for shooters seems to be going towards the ‘maniac’ genre popularised by *Espgaluda* developer Cave. Even the big-name shooters of yesterday, like *Gradius* and *R-Type*, have struggled to command the attention and clout they once had and are virtually ignored by their parent companies, relegated to low-budget projects or cameos. While you may see the more traditional stuff like *Thunder Force* once in a blue moon, such titles have been largely absent of late. It’s sad because while I don’t mind the ‘bullet hell’ stuff, I prefer playing the traditional shooters I grew up with where the focus wasn’t exclusively on throwing projectiles at the player.”

Thunder Force faces a sterner challenge than fellow classic shooter series purely because it possesses a cult appeal: casual gamers will recognise the names *R-Type* and *Gradius* even though they may never have experienced them, but *Thunder Force* doesn’t have the same resonance. Brownlee thinks this is partly due to the modest origins of the series. “Other popular shooters appeared first in the arcade, which was where the new and cutting-edge games were to be found,” he says. “*Thunder Force*, however, had a much humbler and more obscure start on Japanese computers. I’m willing to bet that people outside Japan hadn’t even heard of it until the Mega Drive sequel came seemingly out of nowhere. Even today, many people aren’t aware that *Thunder Force I* even existed. Another secondary reason for *Thunder Force*’s lesser popularity could be because it liberally borrowed from more celebrated shooters, so some see it as an ‘also ran’. In some respects this is valid, but *Thunder Force* refined itself enough to gain a niche following.”

Indeed, Technosoft’s finest hour has gained the admiration of many skilled players, and Brownlee isn’t at a loss to explain why that is the case. “I’ve always been a big fan of shooters in general, but I was particularly attracted to *Thunder Force* because it blends the memorisation and obstacle-based design of the traditional shooter with generally faster-paced gameplay, so you get a better sense of speed and more adrenaline-filled moments than you would through a slow ponder in an *R-Type* game, for instance. I think the games successfully combined solid gameplay with great aesthetics and presentation, as well as excellent soundtracks.”

It may not have the cachet of its 2D rivals, but the *Thunder Force* moniker continues to live on in the hearts of its followers, and will hopefully continue to do so for many years to come.

POWER-UP!



■ Pods (Image Fight)
Ultimate success in Irem’s *Image Fight* relies on proper use of your precious weapon pods. The red pod changes its aim depending on how you move your ship while the blue variant fires directly forward. You can attach up to three pods to your OF-1 fighter to create a formidable arsenal.



■ Tatsujin Beam (Truxton/Tatsujin)
Activated by collecting the blue icon power-up, this powerful lightning-style laser can be upgraded by collecting additional ‘P’ icons until it fills the screen with plasma death. Although all of the weapons available in *Truxton* are not to be sniffed at, this is our personal favourite.



■ Flame Gun (Fire Shark)
Although Toaplan’s *Fire Shark* – also know as *Same! Same! Same!* – features antiquated biplanes and zeppelins, that doesn’t mean it lacks suitably impressive weaponry. The flame gun is worthy of note: it acts like a laser beam and quickly vaporises any enemy unit foolish enough to stand in your path.



■ Wing Expander (Slap Fight)
Yep, it’s those chaps at Toaplan again. Despite having a particularly silly name, *Slap Fight* boasts a wide selection of cool power-ups, the best of which are massive pods, which expand your ship’s dimensions and overall firepower. Take care, though: the bigger your ship, the easier it is to get hit.



■ Gunner Pods (Advanced Busterhawk Gley Lancer)
Once collected, these invaluable side arms enhance your offensive power. A wide selection of different shot types are up for grabs – including twin shots, five-way, spread bomb and bound shot – and the behaviour of the pods can be decided at the start of the game. ■

Special thanks go to Hardcore Gaming 101 for their help with this article.

XYBOTS

With a string of hits to his name, Atari gaming legend Ed Logg decided to take Gauntlet into 3D. Craig Grannell finds out how Logg's plans evolved, eventually resulting in this flawed but highly influential futuristic dungeon crawler

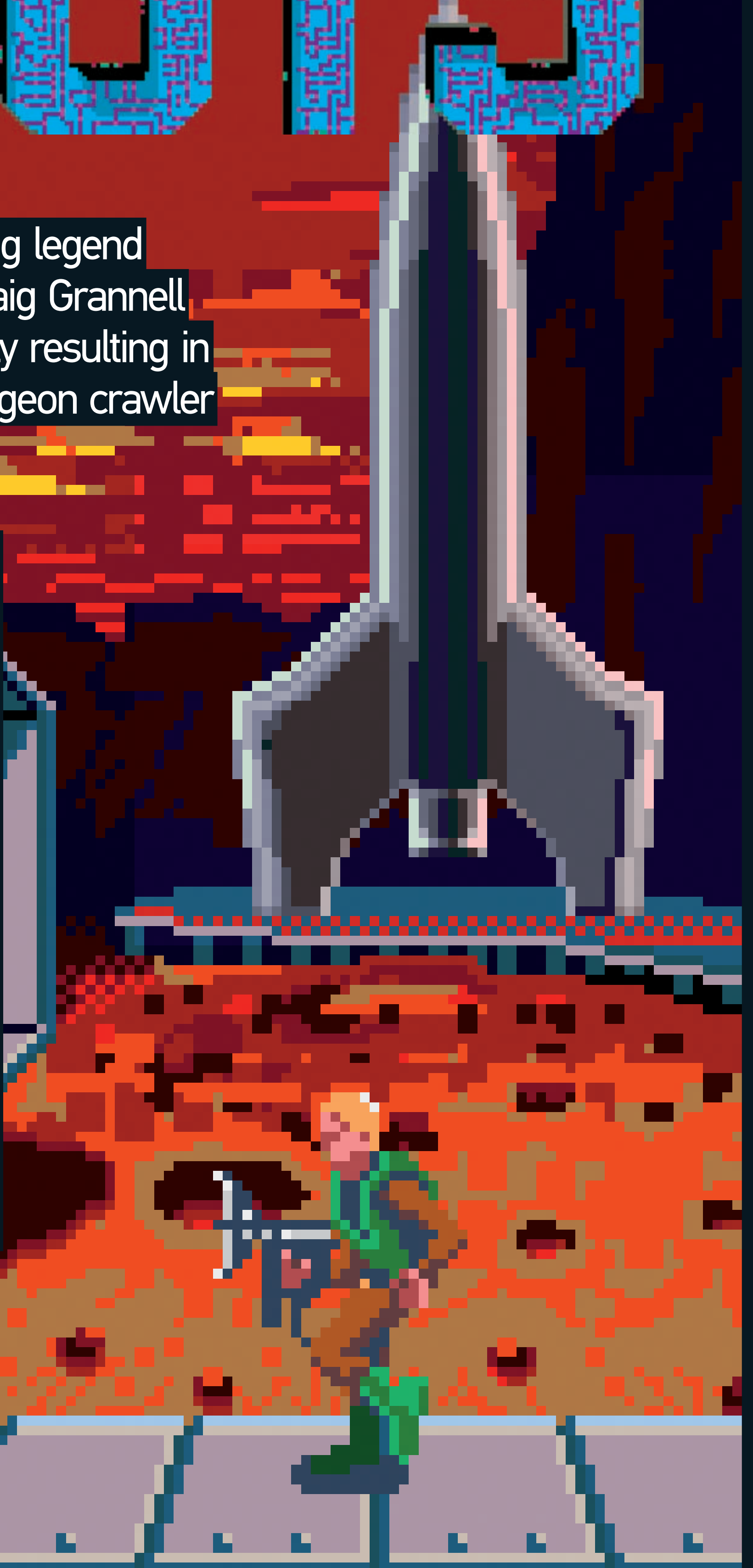
How did *Xybots* begin?
Doug Snyder and I were in the lab, talking about a kind of *Doom*-like maze game where you shot monsters. I can't remember its name, but you had free-form movement and it was PC-based. Anyway, we were discussing its method for drawing the screen, which used vertical lines. We didn't have bitmap hardware at Atari; only the means to draw 8x8 blocks. I started thinking that if you aligned things on an orthogonal basis and limited rotation to set increments, we could do a similar game.



And it was originally intended to be a *Gauntlet* game, right?
Yeah. I put the main *Gauntlet* characters in there, *Gauntlet* enemies, and a maze map you could run through, just like *Gauntlet*. But I remember marketing coming over and yelling: 'We don't want any more *Gauntlet*!' And I was thinking: 'Crap. What can we do?'

How did the robot theme come about? It's a little like *Berzerk* in 3D.
I don't remember *Berzerk* influencing my character design. It mostly came from Owen Rubin's *Major Havoc*. We used that for the main characters and the spaceship coming down. *Xybots* ended up as a take on that theme, but in raster. The same's true for some animations, like when you kill all the robots and your guy blows the smoke off his gun.

How did you come up with the game's control scheme?
The control mechanism was a huge problem. You wanted to dodge left and right but also rotate, so we made this knob at the top of the joystick to rotate





» [Arcade] The 3D view in *Xybots* provides the potential for plenty of stealthy co-op strategy.

your guy. A lot of people didn't get it, and that's one of the main drawbacks of the game. We tried all sorts of other things – holding buttons down and then moving to rotate – but it wasn't as good for playability.

Xybots has other major divergences from Gauntlet, notably the split-screen viewpoint.

Split-screen is a logical conclusion when you've multiple players in a 3D environment – you use the other player's view to say, 'Ah, that's what's going on over there,' and it opens up strategic approaches. You can attack from different directions, or have one guy go around the corner and distract the baddies while the other goes and shoots them from behind. That's pretty different to *Gauntlet*'s core gameplay, where the point was in the players controlling what they saw and having to co-ordinate so they didn't drag in all the monsters at the same time.

So was the aim to make *Xybots* more strategic than *Gauntlet*?

Not really. There are *Gauntlet* players who go through the entire thing on one quarter, and they play very stealthily, never barging around. That was always the way I played – and to a certain degree that's what people expect. Don't just walk around a corner and have the monster go: 'Oh, there you are! [laughs] All those explosions and deaths right in front of me, but I've just ignored them, and I'm also facing the wrong way!' In *Xybots*, we ensured that they'd take that into account – they're sort of expecting you. This wasn't just for realism, but to try and reduce game times. And at higher levels, you want them to be smarter, facing in the right direction, and not just cannon fodder out there saying: 'Shoot me! Shoot me!'

Did *Gauntlet* also inform the level design of *Xybots*?

A lot of the mazes came from previous games – not in the design but in terms of ideas. Wraparound came from *Gauntlet*. There were also plenty of games that did the randomisation thing *Xybots* had – I even saw that pre-'78. There was a fox-and-hounds game that had dynamic maze generation.

Was the overhead map designed to help gamers unused to 3D viewpoints?

It had to be there, otherwise you'd get lost. You needed to know where you were, and it showed the location of enemies during earlier levels. It provided a lot of information you wouldn't get unless you randomly walked around for ages to figure everything out. And you do want at least some heads-up information about what the game world's about.

I guess it's the equivalent of having a GPS. Imagine fighting aliens and having a GPS telling you where they're all hiding!

So what you're saying is *Xybots* is an extremely prescient game, in case we have an alien invasion today?

[laughs] Well, if I were to do the game today, you'd have that view as a heads-up display, but we didn't have the ability to do translucency on the old Atari hardware.

However, you do get the whole 'line of sight' thing in *Xybots*, which makes it feel surprisingly modern.

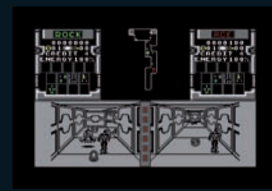
Yeah, and that's an attempt to get a little 'real life' and a little bit of 'arcade play' in there – you're coming up to corners, you want to be careful and look around. You dodge out and rush back. I did other games like that: *Steel Talons* had a radar, and you couldn't see beyond the 'radar range'. The only problem with the *Xybots* system is some people played the maze more than the 3D view.

Were you happy with the game?

I thought it was pretty much the best I could do. You can always continue adding levels and other things, but you get diminishing returns. With *Xybots*, it was maybe 90 per cent of the way there, but it would have taken 90 per cent of the project time to finish that last ten per cent and add more fluff, levels and bosses. And that wouldn't have affected sales. In hindsight, the game was before its time. I had reservations up front, what with the problematic viewpoint, but I wanted to try something new and different – that was the point of *Xybots*. But I do wish I'd fought harder for the *Gauntlet* characters; that would have worked a little better.

» [Arcade] Inspired by Japanese manga, the Master Xybot bars progress to higher levels.





CONVERSION CAPERS

Xybots didn't translate well to home systems, and Logg remembers being particularly frustrated as he saw the conversions being made: "At the time, they were given to another division and you had no say. You'd get games back and find they'd screwed everything up." Despite fighting for a review process, the likes of Logg were scuppered at every turn by marketing. "They were smug," he says. "They said they could sell anything and didn't really give a damn. They never really got that some games didn't translate. It was bad enough with *Centipede* – the horizontal TV for a vertical game really changed the dynamics. But for *Xybots*, how do you do the turning thing on home systems? The answer is you can't – at least not successfully. Some games just don't convert."



IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- **» DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **» PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- **» RELEASED:** 1987
- **» GENRE:** 3D DUNGEON CRAWL
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £500+ FOR A WORKING CABINET



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ASTEROIDS
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1979

CENTIPEDE
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1980

GAUNTLET (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1985



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Magnetic Scrolls

In the heyday of text-based adventures, Magnetic Scrolls was one of the major players. Martyn Casserly unrolls the parchment and delves into its world to discover the story behind the storymakers

"You wake up on a sunny August morning with birds singing, and the air fresh and clear. However, your joints are stiff and you have not woken in your bedroom as you would have expected…"

Now this might sound like the morning after a pretty heavy night on the tiles, but instead it was the way that Magnetic Scrolls introduced itself to the text-based adventure world in 1985 with the release of *The Pawn*. The genre was enjoying its golden age at the time with two big hitters dominating the field: Infocom, the US giant responsible for legendary titles such as *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* and the wonderfully named *Leather Goddesses Of Phobos*; and Britain's Level 9, who had a formidable catalogue of its own, with games such as *Adventure Quest*, *Dungeon Adventure* and *Red Moon*.

"There was certainly a pioneering spirit back in the Scrolls days," co-founder Hugh Steers remembers. "I knew Ken Gordon and Anita Sinclair wanted to start a software company, so we had this idea to write text-based adventures, which suited the limited capabilities of home micros at the time."

For the games to work they needed a writer, so they turned to another of their colleagues, Rob Steggles.

"We were just a bunch of school friends having fun with these newfangled home computers," says Rob. "It was all very new and we learned as we went along. Ken and Hugh were the programming geniuses, and once they hooked up with Anita I was invited to help write a scenario for what was originally intended as a game for the Sinclair QL."

Sinclair's new machine was having difficulty enticing developers to the platform, which provided Scrolls with the opportunity to align itself with a high-profile brand for its first release. The company agreed to develop its debut title for the system, and to subsequently release it under the Sinclair Research label with 'Software by Magnetic Scrolls' adorning the bottom of the box. The confusing nature of the QL's market placement (was it a business machine or a games machine?) plus Sinclair's unsuccessful promotion and unusual packaging (the game came with two Sinclair microdrives in the box) meant that *Pawn-QL* sold poorly, but the quality of the game itself had already caught the eye.

"*The Pawn* was loosely a comic parody of the archetypal adventure fantasy plot," Hugh explains. "There was a princess to rescue, a magician and an 'adventurer', who was supposed to be the one playing the game while the player's character was only there by accident. We experimented with what could and couldn't be done, and tried to expand on the basic 'verb noun' grammar. I managed to get 'put the pot plant in the plant pot' to be understood, so we wrote it into the game!"

Chapel court

The Scrolls office was in the winding back streets of South London, sandwiched between the locations for Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Though modest, it proved a creative

INSTANT EXPERT

Magnetic Scrolls was formed in 1983 by Ken Gordon, Anita Sinclair and Hugh Steers.

After a brief stay in Eltham, the company settled down in the Borough, near London Bridge.

The company's first release was on the Sinclair QL and suitably titled *QL-Pawn*. The game was distributed under the Sinclair Research banner and came packaged with a pair of micro-drives.

Anita Sinclair's bulldog Murdoch became a regular fixture in the Magnetic Scrolls office and was eventually adopted as the company mascot.

The games often contained 'goodies', which ranged from posters and fake newspapers to a fish identification chart.

Michael Bywater, the writer of Scrolls' third game, *Jinxter*, was good friends with Douglas Adams and was reportedly the inspiration for the *Dirk Gently* novels.

The inspiration for The Guardians in *Jinxter* was a cartoon Bywater had seen in *Punch* magazine, depicting middle-aged cherubs with moustaches and glasses.

Originally, the games were published by British Telecomsoft imprint Rainbird, but after Microprose bought the company in 1989, Scrolls decided to look for a new distributor, eventually signing with Virgin Games.



CORRUPTION

> **“Scrolls games tried, to an extent, to let you do what you wanted, silly or not”**
>
> HUGH STEERS ON THE FREEDOM THE TEAM SOUGHT TO ACHIEVE

environment for the emerging company, as Hugh explains.

“The atmosphere and much of the development was lighthearted,” he says. “There were many jokes and pranks going on, but we did put a lot of creative energy into the works. Actually, the development team features in *The Pawn*, right at the end. You reach the room with no windows and Ken hands you a list of bugs to fix while the team runs off to the pub.”

As a writer, Rob found the literary history of his surroundings inspirational.

“The place in Borough High Street was full of Dickensian and Chaucerian ghosts, so it was quite evocative – I kinda liked that. It was a typical development office, though: endless streams of coffee, borrowed and discarded computer bits all over the place and a humming DEC Microvax lurking in the corner.”

Atari had recently launched the ST, and the Scrolls team decided to release a revamped version of *The Pawn* on the new machine. They approached publisher Rainbird with the game and it was met with a positive response. Rainbird’s suggestion that graphics be added to make use of the powerful new systems would also turn out to be significant. Artist Geoff Quilley was asked to create static illustrations for locations within the game, and the results became something of a game-changer.

“*The Pawn* was fun to work on, as it was all very new,” recounts Geoff. “The ST was still very clunky, of course, but the wider range of colours and smaller pixel size meant that you could achieve certain interesting effects and produce quite sophisticated designs. At the same time the restrictions posed enormous challenges. There were certain things that simply couldn’t be done, especially anything too detailed or complex. My approach was to pick up on some aspect of the text that seemed to lend itself to visual treatment and then exploit that, so that the pictures would provide something that wasn’t in the text but added to it and created another dimension to the game.”

The Pawn became a huge critical and commercial success, winning awards and an army of fans. Previously, adventure games had featured sparse illustrations of dubious artistic quality, mainly because of the restrictions of the 8-bit machines, but the high-class nature of the art in *The Pawn* immediately gave Magnetic Scrolls a brand that was associated with quality.

Of course it wasn’t just the aesthetics that caught the eye – the game also featured an advanced parser that could handle more complex commands. But probably the standout feature was the intelligence of the writing. Not only were the puzzles tricky and thought-provoking, the game also displayed a knowing sense of humour that poked fun at the genre itself. This became obvious within a few moves of the starting location, where you discover a ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

1 The number of games Magnetic Scrolls released on the Sinclair QL. (*QL-Pawn*)

2 The number of Scrolls games set in the fantasy land of Kerovnia (*The Pawn* and *Guild Of Thieves*).

2 Greatest hits compilations that were released by Virgin Games. (*Magnetic Scrolls Collections 1* and *2*)

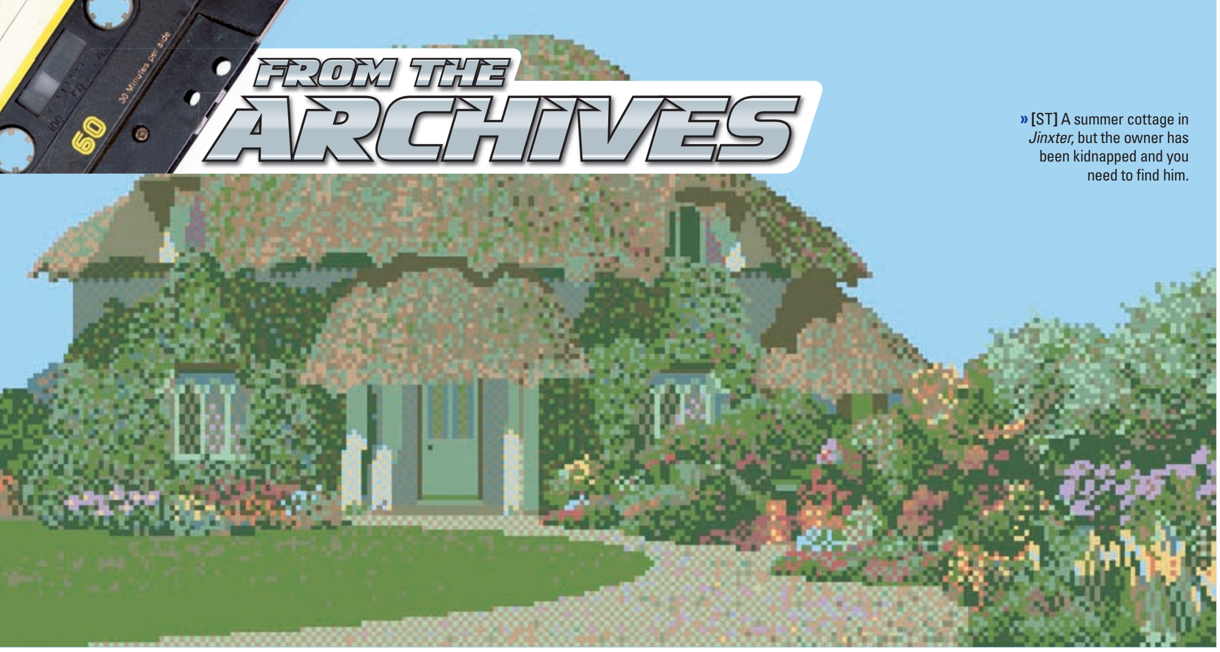
5 The number of magical charms needed in *Jinxter* to finish the game.

7 The number of 3.5-inch disks that the PC release of *The Legacy* was spread across.

8 The number of original titles that *Magnetic Scrolls* released.

13 The number of platforms that *Magnetic Scrolls* games were released on. (Amiga, Amstrad CPC & PCW, Apple 2, Archimedes, Atari ST & XL, C64, PC, Mac, QL, Spectrum and Spectrum +3)

350 The amount of points needed to completely finish *The Pawn*.



» [ST] A summer cottage in *Jinxter*, but the owner has been kidnapped and you need to find him.

TIMELINE

1983 ANITA SINCLAIR, KEN GORDON AND HUGH STEERS FORM MAGNETIC SCROLLS

1985 ITS FIRST TITLE, *THE PAWN*, IS RELEASED ON THE SINCLAIR QL. PORTS TO OTHER SYSTEMS QUICKLY FOLLOW.

> **"The inspiration was really to do an adventure game that didn't take itself so seriously"**
>
> ROB STEGGLES EXPLAINS THE SCROLLS MENTALITY

THAT LITTLE BIT EXTRA

As text-based adventure games involved little in the way of action but instead used plenty of story and puzzles to solve, it became a common practice to put some goodies in the boxes. Magnetic Scrolls was no slouch in this department and included, among others, a novella for *The Pawn*, a copy of What Burglar? for the *Guild Of Thieves*, *Jinxter* came complete with a beer mat advertising Old Moose Bolter. But perhaps one of the most interesting and innovative of all was the cassette that players found in the *Corruption* box. The audio contained actors playing scenes relevant to the plot of the game, which the player would be prompted to listen to once they'd reached a certain point.

"Initially it was just a part of the game that I'd put in – a clue to the instigator of the conspiracy," Rob Steggles explains. "But at that stage it was just described as a tape that had taken various bits of 'legitimate' conversation and edited them into an incriminating conversation – we had not scripted it. Later, it was decided to make it part of the packaging, and Michael Bywater wrote the script and had it made up."

red line on the floor that is described as 'the southern edge of the adventure', a subtle jibe at the invisible walls that many of the current crop of adventure games contained.

"The inspiration was to do an adventure game that didn't take itself so seriously," reveals Rob. "We had a normal-looking adventure setting and then let the character have as much freedom as our system, memory limitations and our imaginations would allow. We all got frustrated at adventures that blocked you and made you solve puzzles sequentially. We all got annoyed at the 'you find yourself…' descriptions, and wanted to overturn some stereotypes. The ideas came from everyone in the team and I tried to herd everything into some kind of story; it was very collaborative.'

Technically, *The Pawn* was a complex achievement that set out to address known issues in the adventure game genre.

"We thought it correct to ensure that every item mentioned in the text of the game actually existed," Hugh explains. "This meant that you could reference such objects in your input. If the text mentioned a candlestick, for example, it should exist and you should be able to examine it or even take it. By comparison, Infocom didn't always abide by this rule in its releases. Often, the text was seen more as a qualitative description of the scene rather than a quantitative one. Although I had huge respect for their games, playing them I often felt I wanted to do something that the game wouldn't let me. Usually this was because it was something daft and irrelevant to the plot, but Scrolls games tried, to an extent, to let you do what you wanted, silly or not."

The Pawn came packaged with a poster of the cover art and a 44-page novella introducing the fantasy world of Kerovnia, where the game was set. These 'goodies' followed on from the example set by Infocom and would become a feature of all future Magnetic Scrolls releases. After the initial success, fans were hungry for more, so the team set to work on their next adventure, *The Guild Of Thieves*. Rob Steggles was again in the writer's chair.

"For the 'difficult second album', we had to do something a little more traditional, more coherent, albeit with a similar voice and sense of humour," says Rob. "If there was pressure, Ken and Anita were very good at hiding it from the rest of us. We just got on with the writing and hoped we had hit on another winner. '

Not content to simply revisit old patterns, Hugh and the development team looked to add more features to the structure of the game to give the player a better experience.

"For each title, we tried to explore new plot methods, and *Guild* was what we termed a 'collect the treasures' game. Although this sounds simplistic, there are several important upsides. Firstly, if you have ten things to collect and you've got seven, then you're around 70 per cent through the game. We learned that people liked to have some idea of progress and a score when playing games. Secondly, the puzzles surrounding these treasures can be largely independent so that it's possible for players to tackle all the remaining targets simultaneously and in any order, trying out ideas as they occur. People liked this too, as they were less likely to get stuck."

Guild Of Thieves was an instant hit and went on to collect, among others, the CGW Game of the Year award in 1987, confirming Magnetic Scrolls as a real force in the adventure game market.

"*The Pawn* gave us impact," Rob says. "But by most other measures, *Guild* was probably the most successful game that Magnetic Scrolls did."

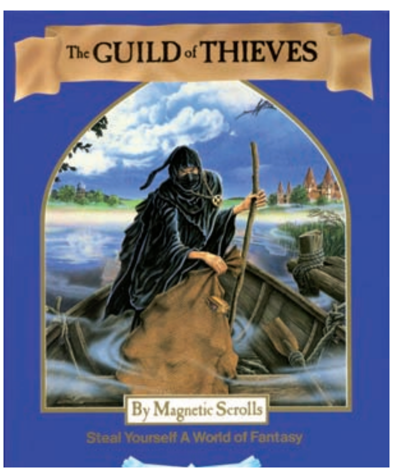
A new world

Leaving the shores of Kerovnia behind, Scrolls' next game would feature an even stranger world fashioned by a new writer. Michael Bywater was already a respected journalist working on publications such as *The Observer*, *MacUser* and *Punch* when he was asked to rework a story written by Anita Sinclair's sister, Georgina. The result was *Jinxter*, in which the player is saved from certain death by a Guardian, who then asks them to recover five magical charms spread throughout the game. The Guardians were not your regular celestial beings, though; instead they were seedy-looking men in Herringbone overcoats who all shared one name: Len. The reason for this was simple, as Michael reveals.

"They amused me, and they amused Anita, and they amused the chaps. No more than that," he says. "Except I suppose we were playing with the limitations of NPCs. One of the limitations is that differentiating them is very difficult. You can do the *Zork* or the *Planetfall* trick and have just the one (in *Zork* it's the Thief who pops up without any reference to what the player is doing



» *Guild Of Thieves* proved that *The Pawn* was no fluke and it went on to win several awards.



1987 *GUILD OF THIEVES* IS RELEASED, GOING ON TO WIN SEVERAL AWARDS. MICHAEL BYWATER ALSO JOINS THE TEAM TO WRITE SOME OF THE 'GOODIES' THAT ACCOMPANY THE GAME. HE THEN PROCEEDS TO WRITE THE SCRIPT FOR THE NEXT RELEASE, *JINXTER*.

1988 THE LAST TWO COMMERCIAL TITLES WITH TELECOMSOFT/RAINBIRD ARE RELEASED: *FISH!* AND *CORRUPTION*. MICROPROSE BUYS THE DISTRIBUTOR SHORTLY AFTER.

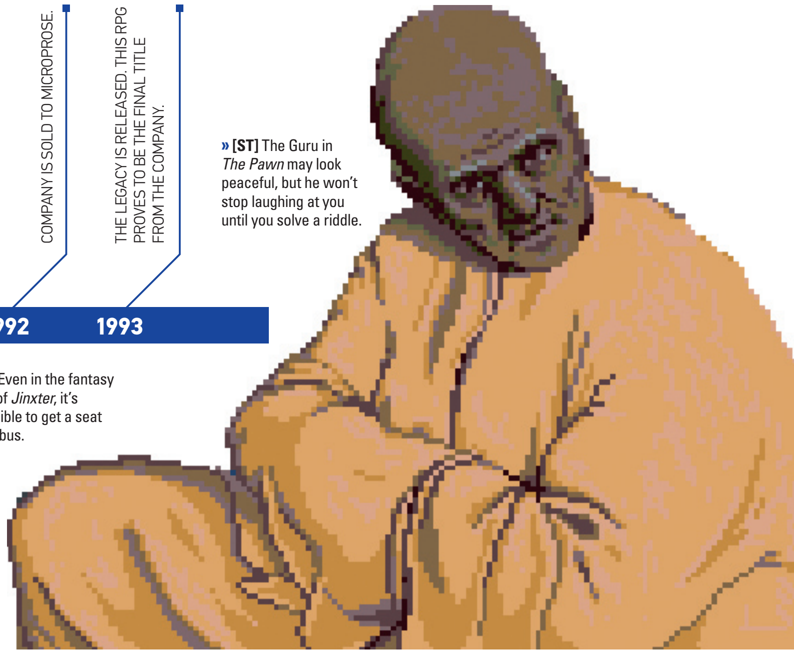
1989 *MYTH*, A FREEBIE TO PROMOTE AN ADVENTURE GAME CLUB CALLED 'OFFICIAL SECRETS', IS WRITTEN AND GIVEN EXCLUSIVELY TO MEMBERS THAT JOIN THE SHORT-LIVED CLUB

1990 MAGNETIC SCROLLS RELEASES ITS ONE AND ONLY ORIGINAL TITLE WITH VIRGIN GAMES. *WONDERLAND* FEATURES AN INNOVATIVE AND TECHNICALLY ADVANCED NEW GUI CALLED MAGNETIC WINDOWS, BUT THE ONSET OF POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURES PLUS THE RECESSION ARE ALREADY BEGINNING TO TAKE THEIR TOLL.

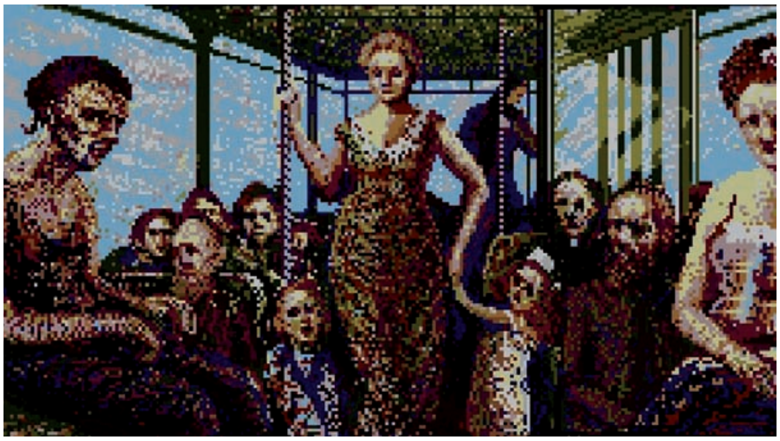
1991 VIRGIN GAMES RELEASES THE FIRST OF TWO GREATEST HITS COMPILATIONS.

1992 COMPANY IS SOLD TO MICROPROSE.

1993 THE LEGACY IS RELEASED. THIS RPG PROVES TO BE THE FINAL TITLE FROM THE COMPANY.



» **[ST]** The Guru in *The Pawn* may look peaceful, but he won't stop laughing at you until you solve a riddle.



» **[ST]** Even in the fantasy world of *Jinxter*, it's impossible to get a seat on the bus.

at the time; in *Planetfall* it's Floyd the robot who follows you around), but we thought we'd turn that limitation into a sort of running gag."

The challenge of writing for a game rather than print publications presented Michael with a brand new set of problems.

"The differences between adventures and ordinary narrative prose are so many that it's probably easier to say what the similarities are," he explains. "Both involve words. Both involve using words to build some sort of imaginary world. End of similarities. I mean, think of the things you haven't got in an adventure game that you have got in a straight – or indeed monstrously bent – story. The main thing you haven't got is narrative control. You can't time things. You can't spin out tension. You can't control where the reader goes or what he or she sees. You don't have the precise control you would in a novel."

Although he may have wrestled with the limitations of the game structure, this didn't stop Michael from penning a surreal and wonderfully amusing script. *Jinxter* went on to be another commercial success for the Magnetic Scrolls team, and is still often cited by many fans as their favourite Scrolls game.

The Eighties boom-and-bust economy focused attention on the fluctuating financial markets, and the next game's setting saw a move away from mythical worlds and spiritual metaphors into a more familiar realm. Rob Steggles returned, fresh with new influences.

"I'd played Infocom's murder mysteries and wanted to try something different from the usual fantasy/sci-fi settings," he says. "Eventually, we settled on a thriller set in the City of London. When it was published, insider trading was all over the papers, so the timing was pretty good.'

Corruption marked another innovative approach to adventures, as the classic puzzle-centred model was pushed back in favour of a character-based game.

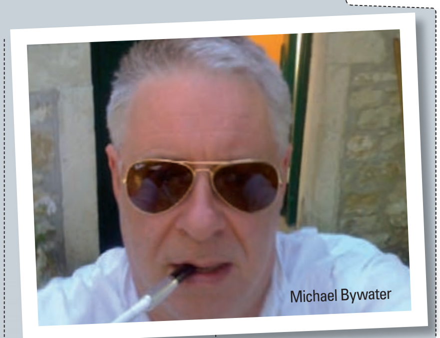
"There were puzzles in the game," clarifies Rob. "But the big puzzle was figuring out a conspiracy and then working out how you could manipulate it so that you came out alive, ie a winner. Pacing it was tricky as the characters had to appear sufficiently real to suspend disbelief. The ratio of character responses as opposed to item and room descriptions in the writing was definitely higher than in any previous games. We also had characters interacting and moving around. In fact, we restricted the modes of talking (the number of ways the player could interact with characters) and made the range of responses for each character much wider. For the endgame with the police interview and courtroom outcome there was some incredibly complicated network/flow diagrams of which response took you where – Hugh had a devil of a job to code that one."

To give them the kind of control they needed for structure – not to mention porting the games to the multiple platforms they now supported – the team had always relied on building their own ▶

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Hugh Steers After leaving the Scrolls team, Hugh began working as a freelance software developer and eventually teamed up with Doug Rabson again recently at Inmarsat, the world's leading provider of global mobile satellite communications.

Geoff Quilley Dr Geoff Quilley left the commercial gaming industry behind and instead entered the lauded halls of academia. Over the years he has been the curator of fine art at the National Maritime Museum, lecturer in the History of Art at the University of Leicester, and is currently the senior lecturer in Art History at Sussex University. He has also published several books and research papers on Art History.



Michael Bywater

Doug Rabson After leaving Magnetic Scrolls, Doug set up the company RenderMorphics with another ex-Scrolls programmer, Servan Keondjian. Together they developed the Reality Lab 3D API, which would later become Direct3D when the company was bought by Microsoft. Direct3D is now an integral part of the graphics API on the Xbox and Xbox 360 games consoles. He currently works at Google with another ex-alumni of the Scrolls team, Steve Lacey.

Rob Steggles Rob now plies his trade in Paris, where he is the European marketing director for NTT Communications, one of the largest telecommunications companies in the world.

Michael Bywater Michael's journalistic career has been wide and varied, seeing him write for national newspapers such as *The Independent*, *The Times*, *The Observer*, and *The Daily Telegraph*. He's also written and held editorial roles at the magazines *Punch*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Women's Journal*. Michael was close friends with the now sadly deceased Douglas Adams, with whom he collaborated on the game *Starship Titanic*. Somehow he has also found time to pen several books, including *Lost Worlds* and *Big Babies* – both of which are well worth a read.



Rob Steggles

development programs rather than relying on off-the-shelf products.

"The basis of the engine for all the games was developed for *The Pawn*," Hugh states. "Obviously, this improved substantially over the course of the other titles, but it nevertheless retained its original architecture. The engine would handle the plain vanilla operation of the world (doors, keys, containers, water, fire, moving things etc). Each of the non-character objects in the games was described by 14 bytes of 'noun data'. This data modelled all of its physical properties (size, weight, texture, material, temperature etc). From this, the engine could manipulate objects in a general way; for example, it would know if a thing could be carried or fit in a bag.

"For a new game, you designed the location layout, connectivity and wrote the room descriptions. Then you constructed all the objects, which consisted of their data plus a textual description. The data was compiled by a program called 'fred23'. This process was tedious, but effective.

FRIENDLY FOES

With Infocom, Level 9, and Scrolls being the dominant force in text-based adventures, you'd be forgiven for thinking that they'd have been cautious, cagey, and possibly even hostile to each other. Hugh Steers and Rob Steggles set the record straight.

"There was a friendly rivalry between Scrolls and Infocom," says Hugh. "I think the general feeling back then was that people bought the games they wanted and that the other companies were not competing against you for market, but adding to the genre."

"We met all those folks at various exhibitions, awards ceremonies and such like," adds Rob. "We always got on well with them, especially the Infocom guys. I vaguely remember someone – Keith Campbell from *C&VG* magazine, I think – organising an 'adventure writers' meal one evening in London during the PCW show, which was great fun. I think we must have all played each other's games – we were fans first and foremost, so if there were any issues, I wasn't aware of them.'

The biggest difficulty with each platform, aside from whipping it for as much memory as possible, was the graphics. Scrolls regarded the graphical pictures in much the same way as you might encounter illustrations in a book. They turn up at some point in the plot, but they don't update or change. People used to complain that the pictures did not reflect the changing game circumstances, but this wasn't feasible. Instead we spent a great deal of effort trying to make the pictures as high fidelity as possible, for the time. Today, the pictures look poor, but in their day some were truly amazing. Each one was drawn by hand."

Scrolls' next few releases, including the weirdly interesting *Fish!* and a mini-game freebie called *Myth* (used to promote a new adventure game club run by Tony Rainbird) kept the public happy, but the team were much more excited about a game they had in development named *Wonderland*, which used a brand new interface called Magnetic Windows. Hugh Steers takes us through the looking glass.

"Home micros were becoming more graphic-capable. When 8-bit micros largely gave way to 16-bit ones, we started to consider how we could use the increased memory, CPU and display. Magnetic Windows was an attempt to move from a text-based system to a windowing system."

Doug Rabson had been on the team since *Jinxter* and played a prime role in writing the Magnetic Windows code.

"The main challenge designing the window system was efficiency," he explains. "I think the slowest machine we were targeting was a 4.77MHz IBM PC with 640k of memory and CGA graphics, and it was a challenge to work in that constraint. The system had to be portable as well – we produced Atari ST, Amiga and Archimedes versions that were all quite different, and on the PC platform we had to cope with at least four different graphics standards (CGA, EGC, VGA, Hercules). We needed a lightweight, portable GUI and there was really nothing available so we wrote our own."

» [ST] There were always plenty of clues hidden in the rooms, not all of which appeared in the illustrations.



"The place was full of Dickensian and Chaucerian ghosts, so it was quite evocative – I kinda liked that"

ROB STEGGLES ON THE OFFICES AT 1 CHAPEL COURT

» [ST] Geoff Quilley's impressive artwork was a main feature in Scrolls' games.





» *Myth* was a free game used to promote the Official Secrets adventure game club.



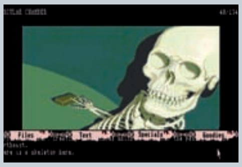
» Though technically impressive, *Wonderland* came too late, as text-based adventures' popularity began to fade.



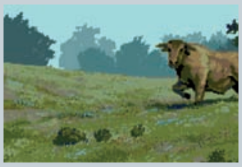
SIX OF THE BEST



The Pawn (1985)
Scrolls introduced itself to the world with this tale of a hero who ends up trapped in the world of Kerovnia. More powerful systems featured the gorgeous artwork of Geoff Quilley, while others had to make do with the excellent story and puzzles.



The Guild Of Thieves (1987)
The difficult second album saw the return of Kerovnia, but in place of the press-ganged protagonist there was a young hopeful trying to join the titular guild. It used an improved parser and fiendish puzzles that increased in difficulty.



Jinxter (1987)
Michael Bywater's surreal humour makes an appearance in this wonderfully weird game. Luck has been stolen by a witch, and it's the job of the player to get it back. The game featured one of Scrolls' popular characters: The Guardians.



Corruption (1988)
With the end of the Eighties being dominated by the impending recession Steggles and Steers moved the setting to the city. The gameplay centred on conversations and even included a tape with pre-recorded messages.



Fish! (1988)
A return to the surreal with a central character that's a dimension travelling-goldfish who has to foil the plans of a group of terrorists know as The Seven Deadly Fins. A team of six artists worked on the graphics, including Geoff Quilley.



Myth (1989)
Not strictly a commercial release, *Myth* was offered as a gift to those who joined the Official Secrets adventure gaming club. As you might expect from a freebie, it was short and lacked many of the innovations found in Scrolls' other games.

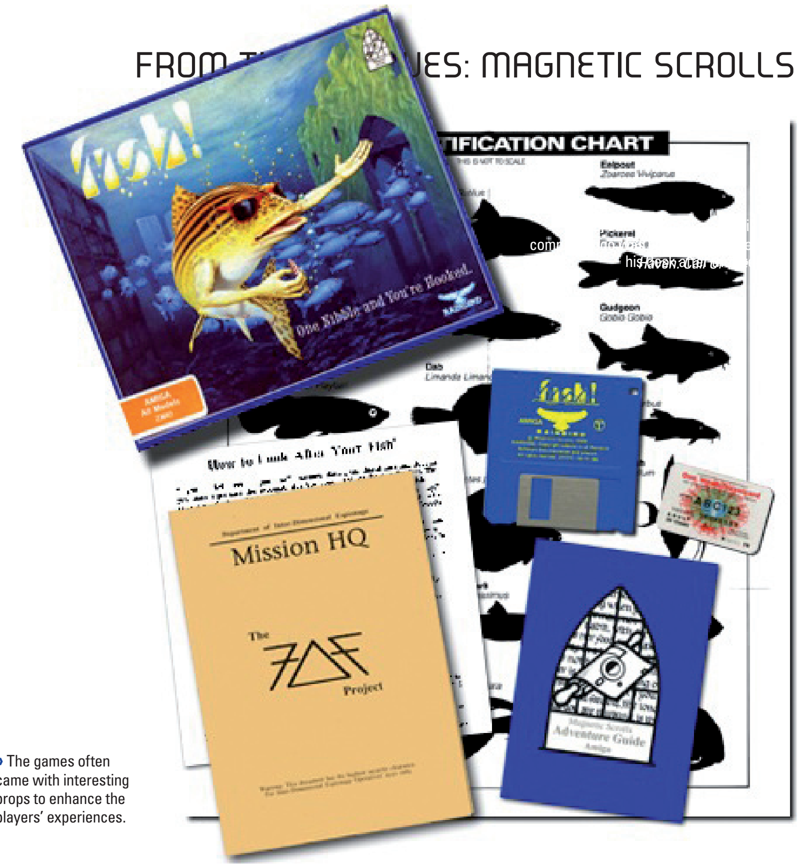
TWO TO AVOID



Wonderland (1990)
This hugely ambitious version of the classic Alice story saw the introduction of a new Magnetic Windows graphical user interface. The GUI allowed the player access to things such as inventory and maps in separate windows, revolutionary at the time. The age of adventure games was ending, though, and *Wonderland* failed to be a big hit.



The Legacy (1993)
The first and only original title to be released under the Magnetic Scrolls name by Microprose after it bought the company. In a departure from its normal style, and in response to the more graphics-based games of the time, *The Legacy* was a horror-RPG that made extensive use of the Magnetic Windows GUI. The multi-windowed screen featured a 3D first-person perspective, map, character stats, and room description. All this high-tech wizardry had a devastating effect on loading times, which meant players on less powerful PCs found the gameplay too slow and frustrating.



» The games often came with interesting props to enhance the players' experiences.

End of an era

As the end of the Eighties arrived, there were already doubts as to whether the text-based adventure genre would survive the new decade. Microprose had recently purchased Telecomsoft, parent company of Rainbird, and Magnetic Scrolls had opted out of the deal, leaving them without distribution. In 1990 a new deal was agreed with Virgin Games and the long awaited *Wonderland* was released. But for all its innovation and hard work, the game failed to make the impact required.

"I think in the *Wonderland* project, we took on a bit too much in one go," Doug reflects. "The game itself was large and complex, and the GUI took a lot of effort to develop. In the end, the project just took too long – by the time it was done text adventures were on the way out and the recession was starting."

If the Eighties had been the golden age of text adventures it seemed the Nineties would be their darkest hour. The once-mighty Infocom had closed in 1989; Level 9 held out until 1991, but financially the genre was no longer viable and soon the same fate would befall the Magnetic Scrolls team. In 1992 the company was sold to Microprose, and although Ken Gordon would release one final title in 1993 called *The Legacy*, the Magnetic Scrolls that had shone so brightly for those brief years was no more.

"It's important to note that Magnetic Scrolls did not go bankrupt," states Doug. "It was wound up in an orderly fashion and all creditors were paid. I think Ken Gordon still owns the company. I left a bit before this winding up but kept in touch with some of the staff, so I heard about it from them when the doors finally closed at Chapel Court. I think that when graphical adventures started to appear, text adventures were definitely on the way out. After all, we expected players to actually read and think."

The company maybe could have converted to the new playing field but, as Hugh explains, that was never really a serious consideration.

"It was clear that the genre was moving towards the point-and-click style; it was one of the reasons why we moved to a graphical environment and added animation. It would have been feasible to adapt to that kind of game in the new system, but the more pertinent question was if that was what we wanted to do. Furthermore, it would have required a scaling up of development teams, budgets and organisation. All of a sudden, something small, creative and interesting would turn into the mundane world of schedules and meetings. I don't think anyone really wanted that."

25 years on from Rob Steggles' words that opened this story, the name Magnetic Scrolls is still held in high regard; a testament to the quality of work and freedom of spirit that marked them out as special. It's only fitting then that he should have the last words.

"Looking at it now from a distance of more than half my lifetime away, I guess if I did it again I'd probably agonise much more over every sentence and full stop and comma; all of which would serve no purpose other than to strangle the DIY/have-a-go attitude that we all had back then. No focus groups, no strategy sessions or project plans – just start, keep writing and laughing until it's done. Add a bit, cut a bit out to make it fit and then ship it. The good old days, eh?"



ROLAND PERRY

Amstrad founder Alan Sugar was said to have sketched his idea for the CPC on a napkin during a flight, but it was left to technical manager Roland Perry to implement the electronic wizardry that made the machine tick. David Crookes catches up with him…

WHEN YOU THINK of Amstrad, Lord Alan Sugar's name immediately springs to mind. In 1984, he unveiled the CPC 464 to receptive critics, hoping to have produced a strong competitor to the Spectrum and Commodore 64. Accompanying the machine, however, was a series of games based around a character called Roland. This tiny personality was named after Amstrad's group technical manager, Roland Perry. But Perry's contribution to the Amstrad story went far deeper. For it was he who designed the CPC's electronics; the man who made the computer what it was…



RETRO GAMER: People obviously know Lord Alan Sugar, but your name is integral to the CPC in more ways than one, isn't it?

ROLAND PERRY: Well, I was involved in the technical design of the computers…

RG: But you also had games named after you, the character of Roland, and the CPC's nickname of Arnold was an anagram of your first name, wasn't it?

RP: Strangely enough, I don't think it was. There was a degree of secrecy in the early days of producing the CPC. We felt that if people knew Amstrad was producing a games computer, we may end up with a kind of situation that would be difficult to handle with lots of people turning up and asking you when it's going to be in the shops, and what's it going to be like and all the rest of it. So all the absolutely new products were designed pretty much in secrecy. When I was trying to get contractors and whatever on board, it was always felt it was useful to keep a level of secrecy until they were signed. I wasn't allowed to tell people who the client was so we had to come up with a codename. And that was Arnold.

RG: So it wasn't at all to do with rearranging the letters of your first name then?

RP: It was more an allusion to Arnold Weinstock, who at the time was running GEC [a British engineering giant]. So there was this kind of forced trail leading back to parts of the GEC empire because people knew it was a UK-based electronics company. Even in those days there weren't that many to choose from, so it was just a bit of a smokescreen.

RG: Did the contractors not ask many questions?

RP: The individuals I was talking to knew me personally because I was at university with some of them and things like that, but they didn't know who my client was.

RG: You didn't get anyone from GEC coming on and saying, 'Hang on, everyone thinks we're making a computer here'?

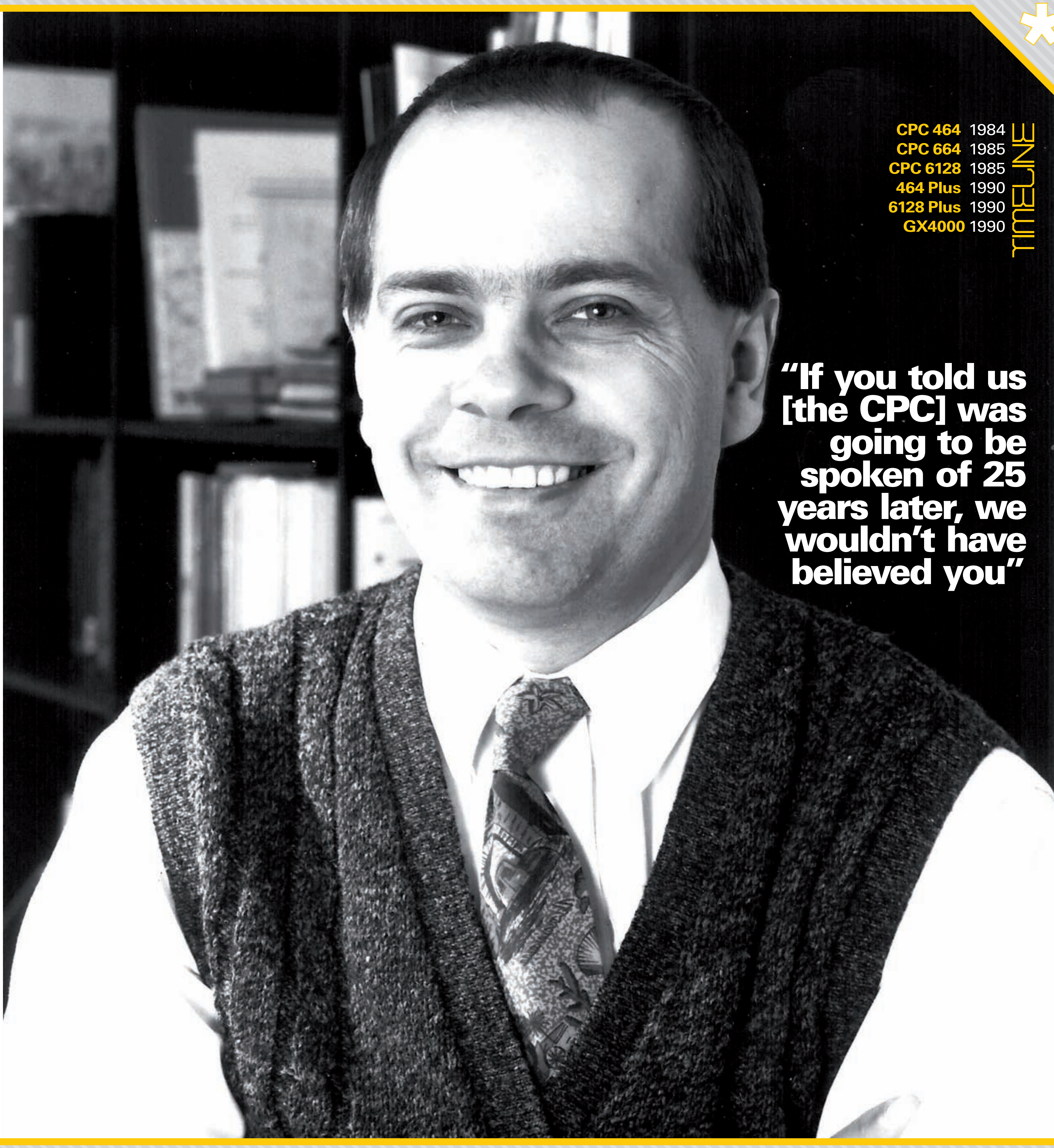
RP: Well we didn't, but one very strange thing happened. Somewhere along the line, *Reader's Digest* got hold of it and published in an article that Amstrad was a subsidiary of GEC, which was very odd. This is after the CPC had all come out and they were publishing either a history of GEC, Amstrad or the electronics industry. But I was completely confused. And that kind of mistake lasted for decades. People would go back and quote that as a kind of authoritative source. It was very strange. These kind of urban myths develop, but there you go.

RG: Did Lord Alan ever see that?

RP: He saw everything, really. I'm sure he must have done.

RG: How did Alan Sugar approach the project? Did he say to you 'Look, we want this machine. It needs to have the keyboard with an integrated cassette drive and one plug'?

RP: He was very much involved himself, yes. He was integral to the concept stage – the fact that the tape drive was included, the fact it has an extended keyboard, the shape of the box, the type of connectors on the back… it had a printer extension port and a CPU bus expansion port on it.



TIMELINE

CPC 464	1984
CPC 664	1985
CPC 6128	1985
464 Plus	1990
6128 Plus	1990
GX4000	1990

"If you told us [the CPC] was going to be spoken of 25 years later, we wouldn't have believed you"

All that kind of stuff is what I call the concept; the fact the power supply was in the monitor and so on and so forth. Lord Sugar put that out to an initial designer who came up with a prototype that didn't work properly, so he transferred the project to ourselves.

RG: What was the CPC like when you first saw it?

RP: The physical design was completely unchanged from the moment we first set eyes on it to when it was in the shops, apart from minor details. All the keys on the keyboard of the first prototype were grey rather than those kind of primary coloured ones you got eventually, and also the plastic of the case was grey rather than the matt black. Apart from that it was absolutely the same – the same moulds and everything. That included inside it the footprint of the circuit board, the position and number of pins and so on of all the connectors. So that was all we had to work with and we basically designed the circuit board around that rather tightly defined footprint.

RG: So why were little quirks like the colours of the keys introduced?

RP: Well, that is another aspect of design. I mean, design is one of these words that has lots of different meanings. I used to get frustrated in later years when people said "What do you do?" and I said "Oh, I design Amstrad computers" and they used to say "Oh, why do you make them that horrid beige colour then?" I said "No, no, that's not the design that

* FIVE TO PLAY

CPC 464



ALAN SUGAR SHOWED off the CPC 464 at Westminster School on 11 April 1984. Roland Perry had been drafted in to see the project reach fruition and the remit was clear: the machine had to be as simple as possible to set up and it had to contain all of the elements needed to get going out of the box. So the 464 came complete with either a colour or green screen monitor (at £200 or £300 respectively) and the keyboard integrated the computer and tape deck. The PSU was inside the monitor and the whole thing ran using just one plug. Although it was originally going to be based around a 6502 processor and have 32k of RAM, Z80 was used and the memory doubled. The keyboard had garish red, blue and green keys and it became a resounding success during its six-year life span.

CPC 664



AMSTRAD WAS KEEN to position its computer as a jack of all trades rather than as just a gaming machine, so it was quick to release a disk-based version of the 464. The CPC 664 still had 64k of RAM, but the colourful keys were banished for a more professional, if not chunky, appearance. The wealth of serious peripherals including a colour-matching Amstrad printer were also made available. Critics would later bemoan the use of a 3-inch disk drive. They held just 178k on each side and cost around £2. Within time, 3.5-inch disks became more popular. But of immediate concern was memory. Many felt 64k was just not enough for a serious computer.

CPC 6128



WITHIN A FEW months, Amstrad had announced plans to scrap the 664 and replace it with a better-looking 6128. This solved the memory problem as now users would make use of 128k. The 3-inch disk drive remained, however. As time went on, a number of games would make use of the extra features. *Sorcery+* was disk-only and reviewed well, but *Nigel Mansell's World Championship*, *Space Crusade*, *Supercars* and *Switchblade* made good use of the extra 64k. Adding music was common. Level 9's games (including *Gnome Ranger*, *Lancelot* and *Scapeghost*) did not contain graphics on an non-enhanced 464, but the 6128 showed off a host of pictures.

464/6128 PLUS



IN JUNE 1990, Amstrad announced in Paris (France had become a particularly successful market for the CPC) that the old range was being replaced by a brand spanking new Plus series. The design of the 464 and 6128 were radically overhauled. Out went the grey and in came white. The computers looked more like the Amiga. Curiously, the CPC name was banished too. But there was a lot of excitement – particularly among Amstrad owners at the introduction of a cartridge port. This soon faded when it became clear only cartridge games could make use of it (although a workaround was soon devised) particularly given the expense of the carts.

GX4000



AND SO CAME the GX4000. Launched at the same time as the Plus range and benefiting from the same £20 million of marketing budget, the GX4000 was a keyboardless Plus (a console, then). It was an 8-bit machine that aimed to take on Nintendo and Sega. There was smooth hardware scrolling, better sound, and up to 16 colours could be used from a palette of 4,096. There were also 16 hardware sprites, each 16 by 16 pixels. The console came with *Burnin' Rubber* and a game paddle. But the expensive cartridges, lack of games and lots of ports of titles that existed on unexpanded CPC machines helped to dash Amstrad's hopes. The CPC range had come to an end.

I did. That's production engineering and artistic design. My design is the electronics and the software and things that go inside them. The concept – so I'm using that as a kind of synonym for design – was that it should look good and therefore have a proper keyboard, a proper numeric pad, and a built-in cassette, and that's what Amstrad had already achieved by the time we saw the project.

RG: The CPC was seen as a serious type of computer, compared to say the Spectrum or the Commodore 64…

RP: I think the Commodore 64 was the closest machine in its class at the time and was the reason why, for example, we went for a 64k of memory rather than 32 or 48, which some of the machines at the time had.

RG: Obviously, Lord Sugar wouldn't have been completely au fait with the electronics side of things, so were you given free reign on what you actually put into the machine?

RP: Well, we had some rules. We also effectively had a budget for the number of components that we could use, and one of the rules was it had to have a 6502 processor in it. That was a bit unfortunate because the hardware and software designers that I found, who were streets ahead of any others that I found, both said, "Well, we'll do this job but only if you can change it to a Z80." So we had to go back and say, "Is it all right if we change the processor to a Z80? And the reason we're doing it is because the designer is more familiar with it.

There's just as many particularly indigenous UK games been written for the Z80 and the Spectrum as there has 6502 and the Apple/ Commodore." And so he says, "All right then, change that." And then it was simply a case of building the design around 64k of memory and a Z80 processor. It had to have sound, obviously. And for that class of computer, it's relatively straightforward what electronics it needs to have in it. It needs to have a CRT controller, it needs to have a joystick parallel port interface chip, it has to have a memory controller, it has to have a keyboard controller, and they're all fairly well-known design elements. We ended up putting quite a lot of them into a custom chip rather than having separate components. I've got a picture framed on my wall of the circuit board. It's not a very densely packed circuit board.

RG: So was the idea to beat the 64, the C64 and the Spectrum, or to be on a par with it?

RP: I think we were trying to achieve something that was pretty equivalent really in terms of features and processing power, because again they've all effectively got the same CPU in it. The fact that a Z80 has got a 4mb processor and 6502 has a 1mb processor is a bit of an illusion, because the Z80 just divided that down for most purposes. So you've got the same amount of horsepower and you've got the same amount of memory; a printer port is a printer port and a keyboard is a keyboard. There's a limited amount you can do to change it. But the things we did put some effort into were arranging for it to have both a high-resolution screen mode and a multicolour screen mode. We had 27 colours rather than 16, which turned out to be trivially easy to do. Some designs coming out then only had eight colours, which is no good at all.



» Despite lending his name to several games, Roland doesn't play many games himself.

> "I've got a picture framed on my wall of the circuit board"

RG: One of the big differences between computers now and back then was the prompt you got when you turned the machine on. The CPC just declared "Ready". And there was no help for the first-timer at all…

RP: There wasn't, but the point was that people had to be able to switch the machine on and for it to say something on the screen and not be just a cursor blinking away. It had to say something recognisable and encouraging, something warm on the screen. It had to have a cursor that moved left and right, and up and down when you pressed those cursor keys, which again was unusual for a machine of that time because most of them would only let you go left and right and press enter. But why would you have cursor keys on the keyboard if they didn't move the cursor around the screen?



RG: Did you design the machine for games?

RP: I think it was aimed at allowing people pretty much the same sort of range of capabilities as something like BBC Micro. In other words, you could do serious programming on it if you wanted to. You could dabble in programming – maybe play a tune, then wiggle some lines on the screen and flash some colours. Or a professional games writer could write a reasonable game that was as good as the games on any other machines around at the time. It did just a bit of everything.

RG: But games were certainly important. It's why Amstrad launched Amsoft and looked for games to publish, isn't it?

RP: We were asked to have a complete range of games ready on day one. That was my job and some colleagues'. What we did was trawl around existing software houses for Spectrum and BBC Micro and whatever, and we said, 'We've got this new product coming out. Would you like to convert your games to it?' because in those days people weren't writing games from scratch for the 464. They'd always be converting an existing game.

RG: Was it an easy task?

RP: We did have to convince developers. Some had been bitten in the past by other firms who had asked them into their offices to talk to them about their computers, convinced them that they really were going to make the machine and then nothing would come out the other end into the shops.

We knew that some developers had wasted their time with other firms and that when we arrived they would have heard it all ten times before from budding computer manufacturers. So we had to give them a pitch that we really were going to produce this and we really did need the games, and so on and so forth. It helped enormously that a well-established company was doing it and not a start-up.

RG: Did you hand out prototypes?

RP: Our first job when we designed the motherboard was to hand-build around about 40 prototypes, and then we gave one of these to each of the software writers so that they could write the software for it. This was something that nobody else had ever done before. They'd either just give people a paper specification to write to or they'd lend them the prototype for a couple of days or something. It was completely unheard of for somebody to turn up with one of these things under their arm and say 'There you go, you can keep it for a couple of months while you finish your game off.' The logistics of manufacturing and then distributing those prototypes was probably the biggest part of the project as far as I was concerned.

RG: Did you hand those to the companies that you felt would be the best developers?

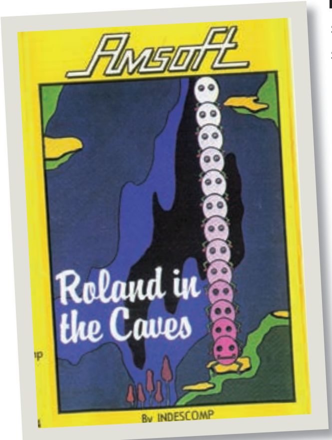
RP: We had this kind of in-joke that the people negotiating the contracts with game designers would come into the office and they'd say, 'Oh, we've talked to another three of the top software houses in the UK today' because we'd get someone coming in and saying 'I'm the top software house in the UK' and you'd say 'Jolly good. There you go then. There's a machine and let us know what titles you're going to convert.' And then a different one would come in and say 'Oh, we're the top software house in the UK.' It was quite funny. I mean, they were all good companies. It's just that every one of them came along saying 'We're the top company.'

RG: So it was all done on a one-to-one basis?

RP: Well, another thing we did was hold a conference where we got the designers together and the software houses, and we hired a theatre on a Sunday. They all came down and we gave them a talk about the project and basically a training course on the features of the machine, which again was pretty much unheard of. Normally people would just be given a specification, told to go away and work it out for themselves, whereas we gave them all this information up front.

RG: You must have enjoyed some gaming time during the making of the CPC, then. What was your favourite game at that time?

RP: In the period up to launch it was probably *Harrier Attack*. That was almost the first game that we had, I think.



RG: A year later, you launched another machine – the CPC 664. It had a disk drive, but the machine itself only lasted six months or so. Was it a mistake?

RP: We couldn't have jumped straight to the 6128 because that would have been too big a jump, but what happened was everyone badgered us to death and said 'Why can't you produce one with a disk drive in it and not a tape drive?' There had been an add-on disk drive right from the beginning of the 464, which again was rather unusual to have that available on day one. But people were saying they didn't want the tape drive and wanted the disk drive built in instead. So we started producing that, and we'd hardly started churning that one out when another whole set of people turned up and badgered us to death to use a 128k version. They were people who were more interested in using it for business applications and things like that. So we kind of went fairly rapidly from one with an added disk drive to one with an added disk drive and 128k of memory and CP/M and everything.

RG: Were they not asking you do these things at the same time?

RP: No, there were two different pressure groups that lobbied us to do those two machines, and it was just a kind of coincidence really that one came out relatively soon after the other.

RG: The 6128 was really aimed at businesses, but you also made the decision to go with a 3-inch disk drive rather than a 3.5-inch disk drive. Would you have done the same with hindsight?

RP: The 3.5 inch disk drive didn't exist then. And people always ask questions like that. We couldn't use a disk drive that didn't exist! The 3.5-inch drive that did exist at the time – I mean we're talking about 1983, here – was a very strange animal that was inside very expensive professional test gear and things like that, and actually went round at a different speed depending on whether you had an inside or outside track. These were very strange and very expensive disk controllers that cost more than a 6128 just for the disk drive. It was a complete non-starter. We picked a drive that was available, was relatively low cost, was compatible with the IBM 5.24-inch floppy so it could use the same disk drive controller electronics and the same disk drive software, or firmware, or whatever you want to call it. It was kind of a plug-and-play operation, and that's the way we went. About two years later IBM brought out a PC with 3.5-inch drive in it, and it was only from that day onwards that the 3.5-inch drive gained any popularity at all in general purpose computers rather than specialist applications.

RG: So when you then later made the 6128 Plus, you really had to stick with the three-inch for backwards compatibility? Was there no temptation to switch at that point?

RP: Well, once you've got a drive in your equipment you might as well stick with it, and the 3.5-inch drive again was still very expensive in those days compared to the 3-inch drive. I don't think anybody would have thanked us for doubling the price of

> "[Lord Sugar] was in and out of my office several times a day. He's not a shy man…"



[CPC] Released 26 years ago, *Roland On The Run* is one of the lesser-known Roland games.

*NUMBER CRUNCHING

Roland went to the University of Cambridge between **1971** and 1974, and gained a Masters in Engineering and Management Studies

He began to tinker with computers in **1974**

Roland started work at Amstrad **10** years later

He designed the original CPC to have a **6502** processor. It was changed to the Z80

There was **1** nickname for the CPC – Arnold. It was an anagram of Roland (but that's not necessarily the reason for its name)

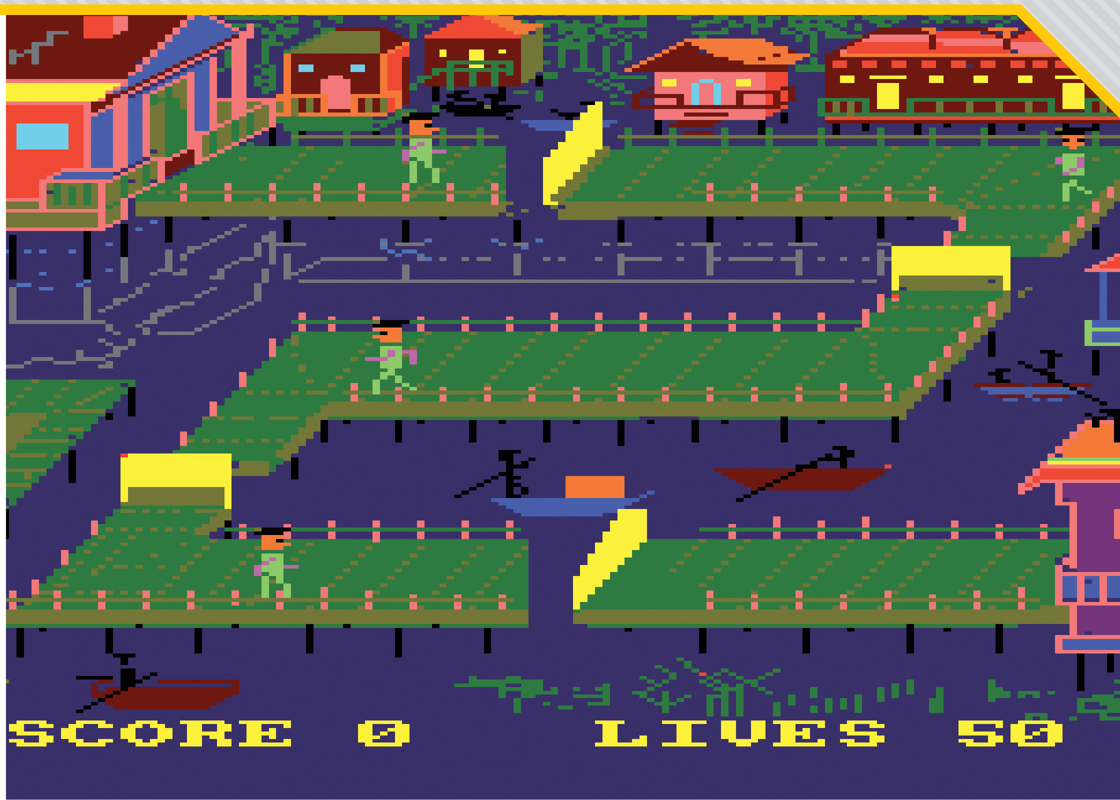
A machine called the CPC **472** was sold in Spain. Roland didn't work on this

His name was used for the **9** Roland games published by Amsoft

Roland also worked on the **2** Amstrad Plus computers and the GX4000 console in 1990

It was decided the machines would remain **8**-bit rather than **16**-bit for backward compatibility

Roland left Amstrad in **1990**



» [CPC] Amsoft had some surprisngly good games in its library. Sadly, *Bridge-It* wasn't one of them.

the equipment just to have another half-inch on the disk drive. It was also enormously helpful to the success of the PCW that people were able to move their CP/M software from the 6128 straight across to the PCW, maintaining that compatibility.

RG: The 464 and the 6128 were definitely popular machines. They did extremely well in France as well, didn't they?

RP: They sold well in Germany, France and Spain. A lot of that success was due to the fact that we did local keyboards. We did local language manuals and things like that, which were things that most manufacturers weren't doing at the time. We went that extra distance and localised everything for Germany, France, Spain and all the rest of it. With PCW we went on eventually to do about 15 or 20 different countries. It was quite a major production exercise to produce translations and create new keyboards and new character sets for the printer and all that sort of thing.



RG: We bet Lord Sugar was pleased…

RP: People used to say to me, "Does Alan Sugar ever pop down and see how you're getting on or let you know what he thinks about something?" I'd say, "Well, only about every five minutes." He was in and out of my office several times a day. He's not a shy man. He would tell you whether he thinks you're doing all right or not.

RG: What was he like to work for?

RP: Very good, because you were never under any doubt what it was you were supposed to be doing. Basically, he's got this knack of asking you the only question you haven't got an answer for. It's extremely irritating but keeps you on your toes.

RG: Is he decisive?

RP: If he decides he wants to do something then he'll go off and do it. There's no sort of coming back a couple of weeks later and saying "Oh, I've changed my mind" or "I think we ought to do it slightly differently," and the worst, which would be "No, that's not what I told you to do. I told you to do something slightly different," and these kinds of things used to plague other people I knew who worked in other organisations doing similar projects.

We were blessed with very, very clear instructions on what to do and when to do it by, and how much it was all going to cost, and so we just got on with it and did it.

RG: When Amstrad bought Sinclair, were you involved?

RP: Not especially, because there wasn't any re-engineering to do. We were designing electronics, we were designing writing firmware and ROMs and that sort of thing, and that was all already done for the Sinclair, so the only thing that really had to be done was just sticking it in a different-shaped box. That was a different department that designed the boxes and designed the monitors and things like that. We were basically the people who did the motherboard and the people who did the welcome tapes, and the manuals, and the software disks and all that sort of thing.

RG: One of the projects you were involved with was the 464 Plus, the 6128 plus and the GX400. Do you think you should have gone for 16-bit, though?

RP: I think the Amiga was around then, wasn't it? And a few other ones like that. You'd have to start from scratch with the design, to be perfectly honest. I don't think you could really take something like the 6128 and suddenly somehow make it into a 16-bit, so it would have been a complete ground-up design and we just didn't go in that direction because the console version of the 464 was basically the same electronics just with a cartridge support on it. We looked at early Nintendo machines around then. We looked at things like the Amiga, but the company chose to go more in the direction of PCW and variants on that, and the 1512 and variants on that rather than continuing to develop the games computer line in the end.

RG: Why did you prevent developers from producing games on tape and disk that could take advantage of the cartridge port? A technique to do this was eventually worked out…

RP: I think the issue with the cartridge port was probably to make it more difficult for people to make pirate copies of the software.

RG: So how did the GX4000 come about, then?

RP: A lot of companies were making consoles, so we thought we'd have a go. A lot of it's also customer-driven. If the high street shops are coming and saying make us a console then you say okay, give us an order and we will make you some. So it's not always driven from the designer end. It can be customer-driven as well. And by customer, I mean companies like Dixons and Currys etc.

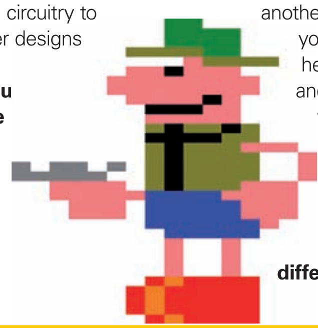


RG: The GX4000 was a promising machine. The graphics were great and there were games like *Burnin' Rubber*. Why do you think it didn't quite do as well as Amstrad expected?

RP: I remember the *Burnin' Rubber* game. That was the one that was shipped with it, wasn't it? I remember one of my lads doing some of the work on kind of integrating that in with the console. At that stage I wasn't particularly aware of which machines then went on to sell well. I started to be decoupled from that end of the process, so I wouldn't be able to comment really on whether it exceeded or didn't meet any expectations on that front.

RG: Were you involved with the design of the GX4000, though, the internal architecture?

RP: Well, in as much as it was a contractor working for me that designed the add-on circuitry to move from the earlier designs to that design, yes.



RG: What were you aiming for with the GX4000 – were you putting the emphasis on graphical capabilities and sound?

> "Fundamentally, the CPC was a very neat design; it was easy to programme for"

RP: I think each time a machine sort of evolves what you're trying to do is put as many features in there as you sensibly can, given budgets. The budget is often the size of the custom chip that you can put in there. Over the years, custom chips get bigger and bigger. I mean, the custom chip inside the 464 has got just under 1,000 gates in it. Something like a Pentium processor has got several million gates.

Between those years, as each generation of new custom chip comes out, you just get more and more gates put in there. But you cannot buy a custom chip bigger than any of the manufacturers will make for you, so you have to treat that as a kind of a budget and say, 'Well, what can we put into the machine, given that amount of budget in the silicon?'

RG: After the GX4000, Amstrad moved away from gaming…

RP: The PCW was important to us. There was also a tablet computer, a kind of an organised pocket organiser thing. The Notepad, it was called. It was very similar to the Sinclair Z88 thing, you know, just a keyboard with a little single-line LCD on it. Then we had a whole range of word processors and we did some IBM PC clones, so generally the focus of the work moved from 8-bit computers to 16-bit, but not game-playing machines.

RG: Was there a sense that the Plus range had kind of burnt Amstrad's fingers?

RP: No. I think you sit down, you have a strategy and you say, 'We're going to have a family of computers.' One family reaches effectively – you know, evolves as much as it possibly can and sells as well as it possibly can. If you're going to go on and do another family of computers you've got to throw your heart and soul into it, and our heart and soul was going in a different direction at that point. It was going into business computers.

RG: On a personal level, was there much difference between the two anyway or was it for you just creating computers?

RP: It's kind of odd. I always regarded myself as kind of the user of the computers, you know? I was really designing a computer for me to use, and if I found it useful I just hoped everybody else found it just as useful. I'd go along to the people, the hardware or software engineers, and say, 'I've had this idea. Can we do this, that or the other, and add this extra feature into it? I think that would be really useful because I'd find that useful if this was my computer.' Most of the time they'd say, 'Yes, we can stick that in, no problem.'

So I just had to kind of imagine myself to be a games-playing person or a family who wanted a general purpose home computer, or a small business who wanted a word processor and imagine myself into that role. I'm just lucky, I suppose, in that I like computers and I can relate to business computers and games computers equally.

RG: So when you look back…

RP: Sitting here, if I was still working for them I'd probably be making an iPad-type machine, but I'm not, so maybe I'll have to buy one off Apple, then!

RG: Do you still play games today?

RP: Not really. My son plays a lot of games. He's got a PS3 and he plays games on that, but I don't play much myself, really.

RG: When you look back at Amstrad's success… I mean, it was a successful machine, but people still always talk about the Spectrum and they talk about the Commodore 64, and the CPC always tends to come in as number three. Does that annoy you sometimes?

RP: I think it's because you're talking to different audiences. There's a sort of enthusiast market that seemed to go more for the quirky machines like the Spectrum and the Commodore 64. I think they found it interesting to work their way round all the various features and things to make it work the way they wanted it to, and of course they were there first. So I think the whole subculture of enthusiasm, which was something that was carried on perhaps longer than for the 464 results from that. The 464 was much more a computer for the man in the street rather than the enthusiast. So if you were hearing from an ordinary person who'd bought one in those days, you would probably remember the 464 more than the Spectrum and the Commodore.

RG: Are you surprised there's still interest in the CPC?

RP: I think we were surprised from about 1985, really. We signed it at the end of '83, introduced it in the middle of '84, and the fact it was still going a year later I think surprised us a bit. If you told us it was going to be spoken of in 25 years later, we wouldn't have believed you.

RG: So, fond memories…?

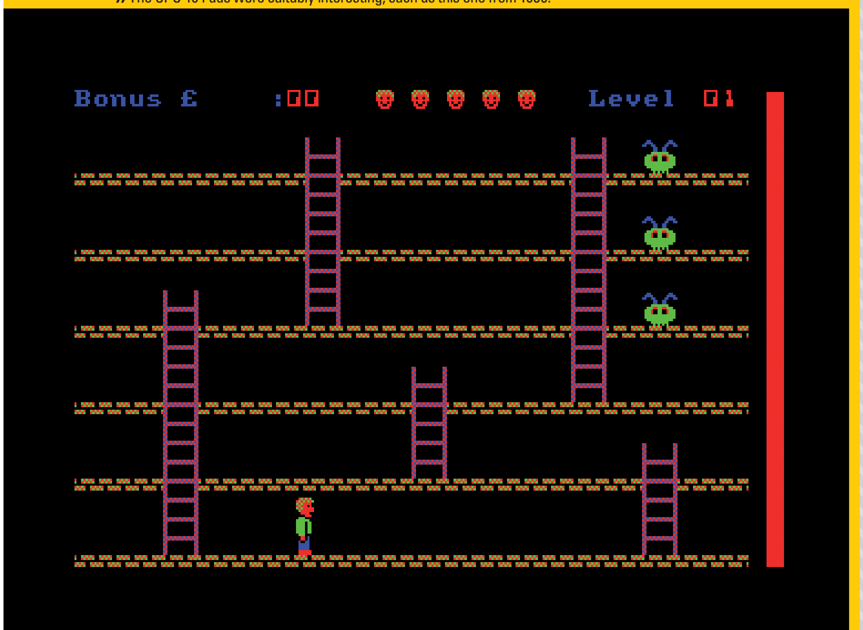
RP: Yes, fundamentally the CPC was a very neat, elegant design. It was easy to programme for; there were no dreadful 'gotcha's' in it that you have to be careful of, so it was just a workhorse really. I loved working on it.



» [CPC] *Striker In The Crypts Of Trogan* made good use of the Plus's extra colours.



» The CPC 464 ads were suitably interesting, such as this one from 1986.



» [CPC] *Roland Goes Digging* received decent review scores back in 1984.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We were inundated with questions for Roland Perry. He managed to answer a good selection of them…

What on earth did you mean when you mentioned that the GX4000 was almost as powerful as the SNES?
I've never used an SNES, so any comparison involving 'power' is a misunderstanding.

Did you ever get out of those caves?
In the game… not very often. It was almost the first game we had, but I spent more time playing *Harrier Attack*.

Who is your favourite Doctor Who?
The first one. I remember when the first episode was shown – long before VCRs or other ways to view again. I think they, very unusually, repeated the first episode a week later, for those people who missed it.

If you're being honest, what percentage of Amsoft games were put out to make up the numbers and were substandard?
All games had to pass a minimum standard, but beyond that it's inevitable that some would be better than others. That's what games review magazines are for.

During the development of the machine, the processor was changed from a 6502 to a Z80. Did you think this was a good thing?
It was essential because the 'new' design team had experience of Z80 hardware and software design (and not 6502), and therefore the project would not have been completed on time otherwise. Remember, we were trying to do a conventional year's work in about four months!

Were there any games Amsoft turned down for any reason and refused to publish?
Quite likely; but I wasn't part of the team that chose the individual games – by then I'd moved on to developing the PCW.

Were you disappointed that so many developers chose to do lazy ports of Spectrum games instead of using the machines strengths?
If the result was as playable on a CPC as the Spectrum, then the extra opportunity afforded to CPC buyers was well worth it.



Do you think that forcing gamers to have to pay the extra cost for a monitor when your main rivals didn't was a mistake?
Quite the reverse; it allowed customers to have a 'complete system', which didn't involve fighting over the family TV. Something that happens to this day in my home when the PS3 gets rolled out.

Were you involved in the takeover of Sinclair and what were your feelings on this?
I helped to evaluate what it was we were buying from Sinclair, and which parts of that bundle could be usefully relaunched after some appropriate re-engineering. It helped keep the product alive; I think that without the deal the machines would probably have simply vanished from the scene.

Why wasn't the image of the Roland character consistent? Do you think Amsoft could have sold more if Roland had been an identifiable one like Miner Willy, Sonic or Mario?
Most of them were conversions from other formats, and a multitude of different software houses. So those characters already existed. In hindsight I'm surprised many of them let us rename them to include the Roland brand. They must have thought it was a useful sales feature.

Aquanaut

NOT WAVING BUT DROWNING

» RETROREVIVAL



» COMMODORE 64
» INTERCEPTOR MICROS
» 1984

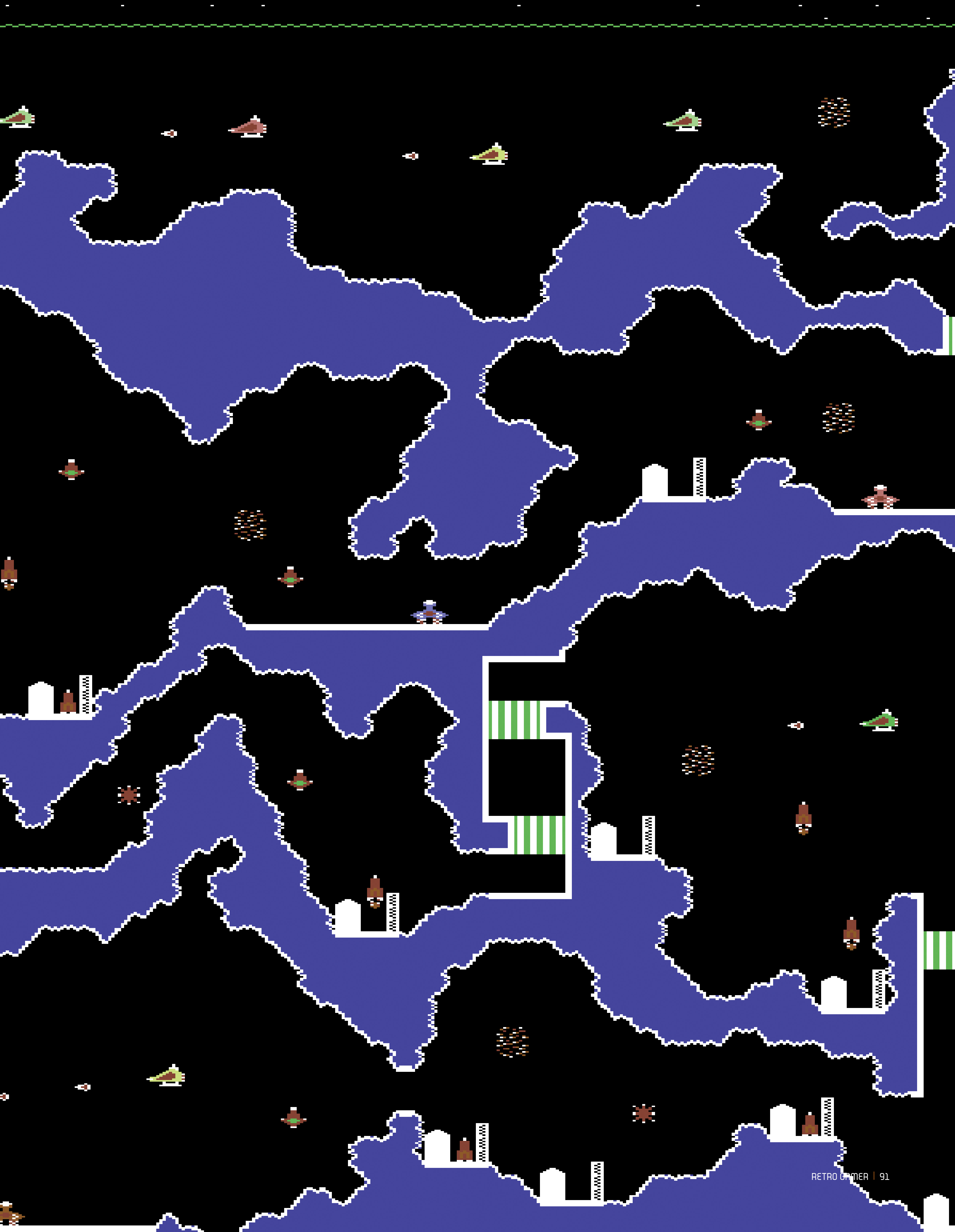
Masochism. It's the only rational explanation for my deep and lasting affection for the output of Interceptor Micros. In the early days of the Commodore 64, the studio's games were like a kind of pixelated purgatory. The chunky *China Miner* and talkative *Tales Of The Arabian Nights* were pretty brutal challenges, whereas *Get Off My Garden* was simply bizarre, yet they all compelled you to retrieve the joystick you had just thrown at the screen and have one more crack at it.

Looking at the work of master mapmaker Peter Weighill, I realise how little I ever penetrated of *Aquanaut*'s watery underworld. I first heard its nautical theme tune wafting from Interceptor Micros' stand at the PCW show back in 1984 and was fascinated and frustrated in equal measure. It was as unforgiving as ever, yet I loved the claustrophobic caverns, the graffiti on the walls and the way it dragged you ever downwards. Where once Interceptor had been content with developing questionable arcade clones (*Crazy Kong* and *Cuddly Cuburt* were unsurprisingly absent from **Retro Gamer**'s recent Top 25 Arcade Conversions rundown), now it seemed to have ambition. See the *Grand Theft Auto* precursor *Siren City* for more evidence of this.

The man behind all the aforementioned games was one Ian Gray, an exceptionally prolific programmer who produced 16 titles for Interceptor in just three short years. He went on to create as many again for other publishers, including *Spirit Of The Stones* and numerous *Dizzy* conversions. Ian seems to have stuck with the 64 from her awkward teenage years, through her blossoming into the beige beauty we fell in love with and into her dotage as the grande dame of the 8-bits. He appears to have left the industry behind, almost as if coding on another machine would be adulterous. That's loyalty for you.

If you're reading this Ian, or if you know the whereabouts of this most steadfast of Commodore coders, please contact the magazine. We'd love to hear your tale and relive the pleasure… and the pain. *



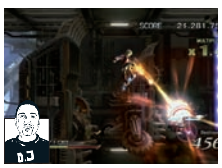


RETRORATED



>> After numerous requests we're now including a list of all the monthly retro releases that are available on Nintendo's Virtual Console, Sony's PSN and Microsoft's Game Room services. You've never had it so good!

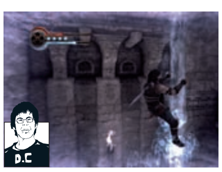
★ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Sin And Punishment 2
It's a giddy rollercoaster that features everything I love about the genre. Terrific stuff.



STUART
GTA: Episodes From Liberty City
I really enjoyed playing this on the Xbox 360, so it's been fun to revisit it on the PS3.



DAVID
Prince Of Persia: The Forgotten Sands
It's not his best moment, but I still love the Prince.

>> SIN AND PUNISHMENT: SUCCESSOR OF THE SKIES

Wii



IS IT A SIN TO LOVE THIS MUCH PUNISHMENT?

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Sin And Punishment* was released on the N64 in 2000 and quickly won acclaim due to its challenging control system, spectacular visuals and inventive bosses. It was eventually released on Nintendo's Virtual Console in 2007, where it's become one of its most popular downloads.

★ WHY NOT TRY

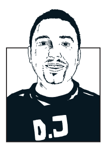
▼ SOMETHING OLD
SIN AND PUNISHMENT (N64)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
PANZER DRAGOON ORTA (XBOX)



Sin And Punishment: Successor Of The Skies



Treasure shares the same mentality as Cave. It makes games it wants to make and the potential consequences can be damned. Treasure, like Cave, is unlikely to have a surefire mainstream hit, but as long as it continues doing what it does, we'll be happy.

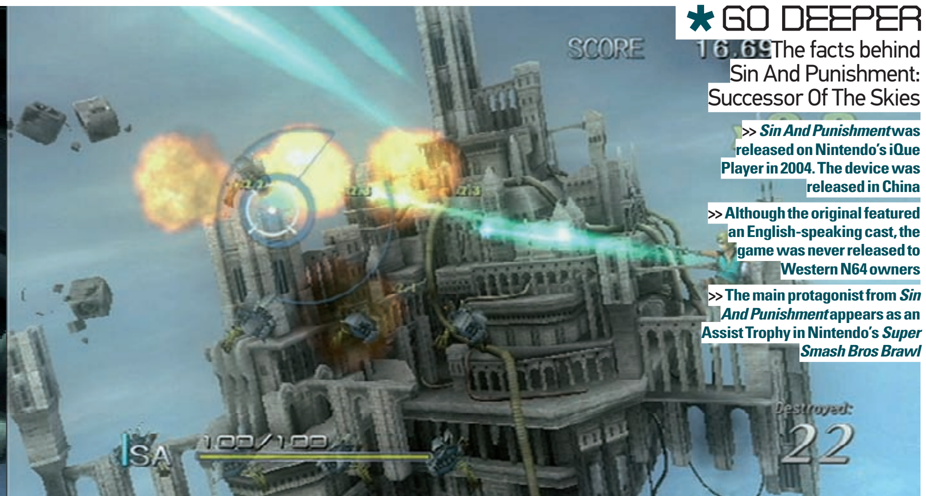
Sin And Punishment: Successor Of The Skies is one of the most exhilarating, gob-smacking rollercoaster rides you'll ever encounter. Like *Radiant Silvergun* and the original *Sin And Punishment*, Treasure's sequel is little more than a glorified boss rush, albeit one that's chock full of some of the most mesmerising and genuinely jaw-dropping moments to ever feature in a shoot-'em-up/run-and-gun.

One minute you're racing along a stretch of road on what looks like *Golden Axe*'s Chickenleg while being chased by a gargantuan laser-spewing cat. Then you're being ferociously pummelled by a vicious vulture, and then the gargantuan laser-spewing cat and vicious vulture combine into one of the nuttiest videogame bosses you're ever likely to see. It's pure eye-candy thanks to the insanely slick presentation



» [Wii] This level is fantastic, playing like a weird hybrid of *F-Zero* and *Panzer Dragoon*.





★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Sin And Punishment: Successor Of The Skies

>> *Sin And Punishment* was released on Nintendo's iQue Player in 2004. The device was released in China

>> Although the original featured an English-speaking cast, the game was never released to Western N64 owners

>> The main protagonist from *Sin And Punishment* appears as an Assist Trophy in Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros Brawl*





and some of the most stunning visuals that we've ever seen the Wii produce.

We won't dwell too much on the story because it's utterly insane and gets in the way of all the amazing shooty bits, but then plot was never one of Treasure's strong points. What it does is marry stunning aesthetics with hard-as-rock play mechanics, and this astonishing sequel succeeds on all fronts.

Ignore any thoughts of playing this with either the classic controller or GameCube pad, because this has been built with the Wii's controls in mind from the very beginning. The Nunchuck moves you around and allows you to jump and pull off an invulnerable dash, while the Remote aims your reticule and lets you alternate between lock-on lasers and a steady stream of dangerous fire. It's also possible to slash at nearby enemies with a quick tap of the relevant button.

Initially it feels like rubbing your tummy and patting your head at the same time, but suddenly it clicks and you'll wonder how you ever managed to play the original N64 game any other way.

You'll quickly need to master *Sin And Punishment*'s controls as well, because Treasure insists on constantly punishing you with an array of inventive mayors that boast gruelling attack patterns and ridiculously lengthy energy bars that take an age to deplete. Sometimes, though, Treasure goes too far, with boss encounters that straddle the wrong side of challenging – good luck trying to take down the samurai lass on your first attempt – and will have you cursing in frustration at their cheapness and unfairness. Fortunately, these moments rarely appear, allowing you to simply enjoy one of the most entertaining and madcap shooters of recent years.

OPINION



What can I say? Basically just *Space Harrier* on steroids, Treasure has delivered us the goods yet again with a sublime sequel. While you really need to own an HD telly to fully appreciate the game's visuals, this is nevertheless a must-own Wii shooter that combines the very best elements of the original game with the newer machine's controls. It's a match made in heaven.

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

Yes, it features some frustratingly unfair bosses, and certain levels tend to drag on, but this remains another excellent thrill ride from Treasure.

>> Scores

Presentation	80%
Graphics	95%
Sound	92%
Playability	94%
Addictivity	85%

Overall 90%

VIRTUAL ROUND-UP

>> WELCOME TO A NEW SECTION THAT COVERS ALL THE MONTHLY RETRO RELEASES THAT ARE AVAILABLE IN DIGITAL FORM

VIRTUAL CONSOLE



Super Mario Kart
» **System:** SNES
» **Points:** 800
» **Rating:** ★★★★★
» Some people aren't too keen on Mario's first karting game. These people are mad. It remains an excellent racer in terms of course design. An essential download for fans.

Final Fantasy
» **System:** NES
» **Points:** 600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

The King Of Fighters 95
» **System:** Neo Geo AES
» **Points:** 900
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures
» **System:** SNES
» **Points:** 800
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Mega Man 4
» **System:** NES
» **Points:** 500
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Blaster Master
» **System:** NES
» **Points:** 500
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Ghoul Patrol
» **System:** SNES
» **Points:** 800
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Fatal Fury Special
» **System:** Neo Geo AES
» **Points:** 900
» **Rating:** ★★★★★

Ogre Battle 64: Person Of Lordly Caliber
» **System:** N64
» **Points:** 1,200
» **Rating:** ★★★★★

PLAYSTATION NETWORK

Final Fantasy VIII
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Price:** £7.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★★

Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Price:** £3.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

GAME ROOM

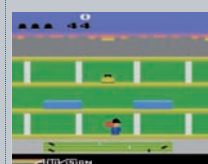
* All games are 240 Points

Basketball
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Megamania
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Nightstalker
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Pitfall!
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆



Keystone Kapers
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆
» Excellent little platformer from Activision that sees you chasing after an escaping robber. It's still technically impressive, and remains fun and furious to play.

RealSports Volleyball
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Super Breakout
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Battlezone
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Canyon Bomber
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Rack 'Em Up
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Mega Zone
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Night Driver
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Oink!
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Soccer
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Asteroids
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★★★

Demons To Diamonds
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Grand Prix
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Shark! Shark!
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Space Duel
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Stampede
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Time Pilot
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★★★

Boxing
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆



River Raid
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆
» It may be over two decades old now, but *River Raid* remains a fantastic little shooter. A great score chaser.

Millipede
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★★★

Spider Fighter
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Strategy-X
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Buzz Bombers
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Haunted House
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

XBLA

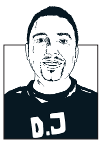


» [XBLA] Whatever our thoughts on the game, we're happy to see another retro hero making a return.

Rocket Knight

CLIMAX FAILS TO FIND SPARKSTER'S SPARK

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PSN, PC » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI » **DEVELOPER:** CLIMAX » **PLAYERS:** 1



The return of Sparkster is a bittersweet experience. While we're overjoyed that the flying marsupial is once again on our screens, his new adventure lacks the magic that made his original 16-bit outing so enjoyable.

Our biggest problem with *Rocket Knight* is the uneven difficulty. The vast majority of stages can be completed with little to no effort at all, until you hit one of *Rocket Knight*'s many impressive bosses. The difficulty suddenly goes through the roof and the level of enjoyment is only saved by the fact that the way you dispense with your enemies is so inventive.

It's a pity that Climax couldn't have made more of *Rocket Knight*'s balancing issues, as the core gameplay is perfectly sound. Sparkster has a variety of additional moves, including a handy drill attack and the ability to deflect certain missiles, and controls perfectly. There are also clever little touches such as cold levels that freeze



Sparkster's rocket pack and stop it from slowly refuelling.

Aesthetically, it's also impressive thanks to a wonderfully soaring orchestral soundtrack, beautiful animation and charming visuals that easily capture the spirit of Sparkster's 16-bit appearances.

It's sadly not enough, though, as *Rocket Knight* is just so bland to actually play. Add to this a rather steep price tag and Climax's latest release becomes more a curiosity item for anyone who enjoyed the original games than a must-have download. Pity.

OPINION



I actually liked this more than Darran. While I would have preferred to see the aesthetics left untouched, the new visual style looks great. The core gameplay is solid and there's a nice array of new moves, but I would have to put the bosses down as the true stars of the show.

Stuart Hunt

>> Scores

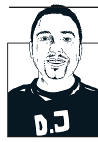
Presentation	72%
Graphics	84%
Sound	83%
Playability	75%
Addictivity	58%

Overall 64%

Grand Theft Auto: Episodes From Liberty City

TWO GREAT GTA GAMES FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360, PC » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PUBLISHER:** ROCKSTAR » **DEVELOPER:** ROCKSTAR NORTH » **PLAYERS:** 1-16



For all its hype and fanfare, we weren't big fans of *GTA IV*, seeing it as a shiny, slimmed-down version of *San Andreas*.

This new collection featuring *The Lost And Damned* and *The Ballad Of Gay Tony*, both of which first appeared on the 360, finally manages to address all the little niggles we had with *GTA*'s next-gen debut and are excellent games in their own right.

Rockstar's games have always featured well-written, believable characters, and while main protagonists Luis Lopez and Johnny Klebitz don't quite match the humanity of Niko Bellic, they're nevertheless interesting, well-rounded characters that fit in well with the diverse personalities of Liberty City.

It's the mission structure and plots that we're most impressed with, however, and while you won't get as much game as in Niko's adventure, what's on offer – a good ten hours each – is well worth the lower retail price. Mid-mission checkpoints – something sorely missing from *GTA IV* – make a big difference to the flow of *The Lost And Damned*, while *The Ballad Of Gay Tony* features the same excellent option to replay completed missions that first featured in *Chinatown Wars*.

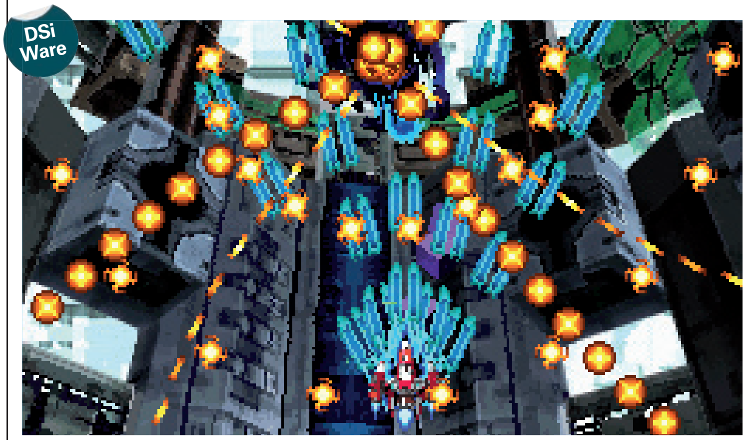
Add in plenty of new weapons and vehicles, a wealth of excellent multiplayer modes and the return of the good old parachute, and *Episodes From Liberty City* becomes an essential purchase that any *Grand Theft Auto* fan needs in their collection.

>> Scores

Presentation	80%
Graphics	88%
Sound	90%
Playability	92%
Addictivity	87%

Overall 91%

DSi Ware



Metal Torrent

» **SYSTEM:** DSiWARE » **PRICE:** 500 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> After disappointing with *Ketsui Death Label*, Arika makes amends with this wondrous little shooter. A simple score-attack game – you'll complete all eight stages in under ten minutes – it's nevertheless ace thanks to its clever mechanics – destroying enemies and bullets releases different coloured cubes – that ensure the online leaderboards will get plenty of entries. Visually it's a little dull, but this remains a great cheap blaster for score-attack fiends who want something portable.

>> Score **83%**

retro GAMER SIZZLER



» [PS3] The episodes are also downloadable, but the standalone retail package is a brilliant deal.

PS3



OPINION

GTA fans should snap this up immediately. You get two fantastic games here, which show a different side to Liberty City. Featuring great characters, new vehicles, modes and great missions, this is up there with the likes of *The Orange Box* for value.

Stuart Hunt

Bit.Trip Runner

PITFALL! GETS ALL FUNKY

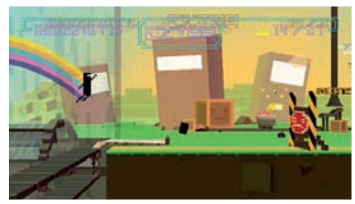
» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WiiWARE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** AKSYS GAMES » **DEVELOPER:** GAIJIN GAMES » **PLAYERS:** 1

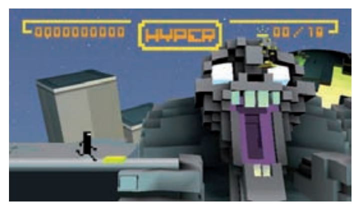
Gaijin's *Bit.Trip* series has built a solid reputation for fusing old-school game design with some of the most eclectic-sounding tunes around. We're delighted to say that *Bit.Trip Runner* follows this grand tradition.

Taking control of Commander Video, all you have to do is simply get to the end of each stage, collecting any gold bars that you find along the way. Hit an object and you'll be instantly transported to the stage's beginning and must restart it. Once you reach the end, your score will be totted up and if you've collected all the available gold bars you'll visit a bonus stage that's even more of an obvious clone of *Pitfall!* than the main 50-stage game.

As with all *Bit.Trip* games, it's the way that new play mechanics are introduced that make it such a joy to play. Initially all you'll be able to do is jump over incoming objects in order to avoid them, but Gaijin effortlessly introduces new mechanics that allow you to slide, spring and even kick incoming objects.

Add in the fact that every move is accompanied by its own audio cue and that picking up Mega Beats – depicted by orange plus signs – adds a new layer to each level's brilliant soundtrack and *Bit.Trip Runner* becomes even more of a joy to play. An essential WiiWare game for retro platform fans.





OPINION

If you have the patience of a saint and are currently looking for something highly addictive, simple to grasp and good fun to play, then this is an essential WiiWare purchase. Those of you with anger management issues, though, are advised to steer well clear.

Stuart Hunt

>> Scores

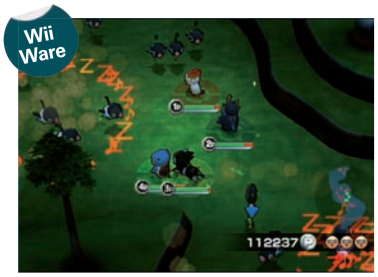
Presentation	85%
Graphics	88%
Sound	94%
Playability	90%
Addictivity	84%
Overall	**86%**

» [WiiWare] Retro fans will adore the *Bit.Trip* series' looks.

Wii Ware



Wii Ware



Pokémon Rumble

» **SYSTEM:** WiiWARE
» **PRICE:** 1,500 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> Now here's a guilty pleasure. *Pokémon Rumble* is incredibly simplistic stuff but we can't stop playing it. Taking a weak toy Rattata, you have to battle other toy Pokémon and befriend more powerful monsters until you can compete in the free-for-all rumble. Add in 151 Pokémon to collect and a variety of special moves to discover and *Pokémon Rumble* becomes a strangely compelling experience.

>> Score **78%**

XBLA



RayStorm HD

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

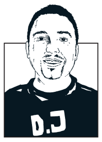
>> *Raystorm* was never an essential blaster back in the day and time has not been kind to it. Despite featuring two distinct game modes and the same lock-on techniques as its predecessor *RayForce*, it just doesn't excite in the same way. Slightly slower paced and with less interesting bosses and attack waves, it's also let down by an insanely high price tag for what it offers. One for hardcore fans only.

>> Score **64%**

PS3

BEST FORGET ABOUT THE GAME AS WELL

Prince Of Persia: The Forgotten Sands



Well this is a disappointment. *The Sands Of Time* was a truly wonderful slice of platforming, that, while hampered by boring combat, was saved thanks to an excellent storyline and awesome platforming sections. Ubisoft Montreal has attempted to recapture the lightning it so successfully bottled in 2003 – and who could blame it? Unfortunately, it just hasn't worked.

The biggest issue we have with *The Forgotten Sands* is that everything about it just feels so pedestrian and workmanlike, as if the game was simply being hurried out to tie in with the Prince's first cinematic release. Aesthetically it's incredibly bland to look at, with plain texturing, uninspiring locations and unimaginative enemies. The Prince himself is as beautifully animated as ever, but it's small consolation when everything he interacts with is just so dull.

Combat – never really a strong point in the series – is also disappointing thanks to simplistic play mechanics that wouldn't tax a ten-year-old. Granted, there are plenty of enemies on screen, but rather than impose any sense of epic scale, they simply drag the fights out and make them a chore to play through.

The one saving grace of *The Forgotten Sands* is the beautifully crafted platforming sections that give an impressive sense of scale and verticality. Even these disappoint, though, as virtually every section of the game is incredibly easy to negotiate due to telling signals that make *The Forgotten Sands* feel more like a 'My First *Prince Of Persia*' instead of a true sequel to the excellent *Sands Of Time*. Things pick up a little as the game progresses and you unlock new elemental abilities – many of which have to be strung together in quite creative ways in sequences that require satisfying amounts of dexterity – but even then everything feels very 'by the numbers'. It's as if Ubisoft Montreal was simply intent on sitting back on the series' laurels, rather than adding anything special to the Prince's repertoire of moves.

Add in a nonsensical storyline with an ending that you can see coming a mile off and *The Forgotten Sands* becomes arguably the most lacklustre game in the series – *Prince Of Persia 3D* aside – to date. Newcomers to the franchise will no doubt glean some enjoyment from the Prince's latest outing, but everyone else will get a nagging sense of déjà vu.

In a nutshell

Bland and completely forgettable, *The Forgotten Sands* tries hard, but just can't recapture the magic that made *Sands Of Time* such a joy to play through. What a shame.

>> Scores

Presentation	53%
Graphics	62%
Sound	59%
Playability	60%
Addictivity	42%

Overall 56%

OPINION



In terms of a movie tie-in, this is a very decent effort, made to appeal to series newcomers. For seasoned fans, this latest instalment will hold a certain amount of enjoyment but those expecting it to reach anywhere near the delights of *Sands Of Time* will be left disappointed.

Stuart Hunt

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360, PC, WII, DS, PSP, PS2
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £49.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT MONTREAL
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» Jordan Mechner's *Prince Of Persia* series made its debut on the Apple II in 1989. An immediate success thanks to super-slick animation and clever puzzle design, it has gone on to spawn numerous sequels and even a recent Hollywood feature film starring Jake Gyllenhaal.

✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
FLASHBACK (MEGA DRIVE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
ASSASSIN'S CREED II (360)





» [PS3] Later stages allow you to freeze water into columns for short periods of time.



» [PS3] Combat is dull and extremely monotonous, and even boss encounters don't impress.

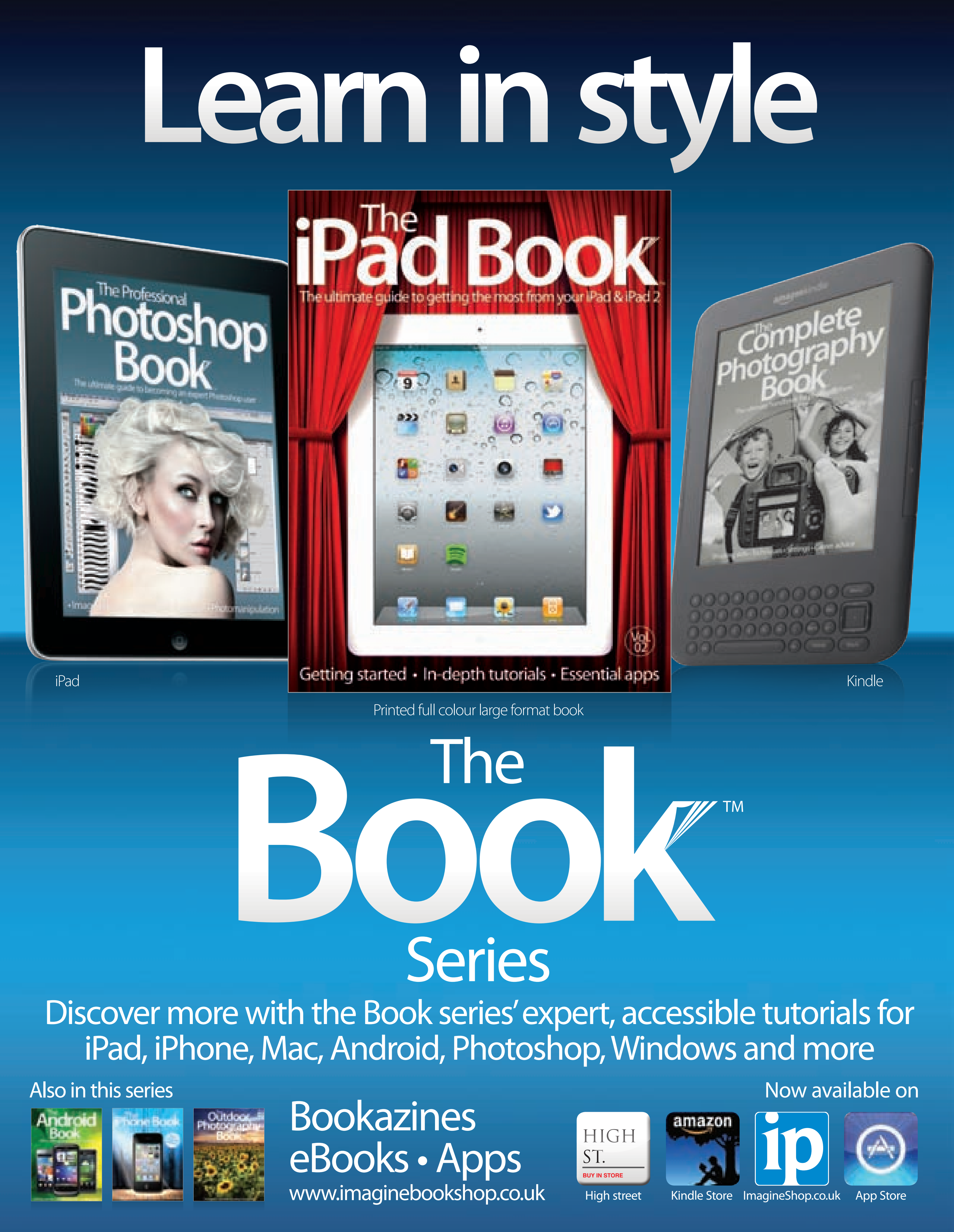
✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Prince Of Persia: The Forgotten Sands

>> *The Forgotten Sands* takes place in the seven-year gap between *The Sands Of Time* and *Warrior Within*

>> Veteran voice actor Yuri Lowenthal, who has appeared in over 100 videogames, voices the Prince





Learn in style
The Professional Photoshop Book
The iPad Book
The ultimate guide to getting the most from your iPad & iPad 2
Getting started • In-depth tutorials • Essential apps
Vol. 02
The Complete Photography Book
iPad
Kindle
Printed full colour large format book
The Book™ Series
Discover more with the Book series' expert, accessible tutorials for iPad, iPhone, Mac, Android, Photoshop, Windows and more
Also in this series
Android Book
Outdoor Photography Book
Bookazines
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App Store



There's been quite a bit of activity on the Atari 8-bit lately, and one fantastic piece of news that arrived just as I was finishing everything up is that the conversion of Space Harrier, which has been an ongoing project for over eight years, is nearing completion. This is something that I've been seriously looking forward to. Search YouTube for "Space Harrier Atari 8bit" and you can see why for yourself.

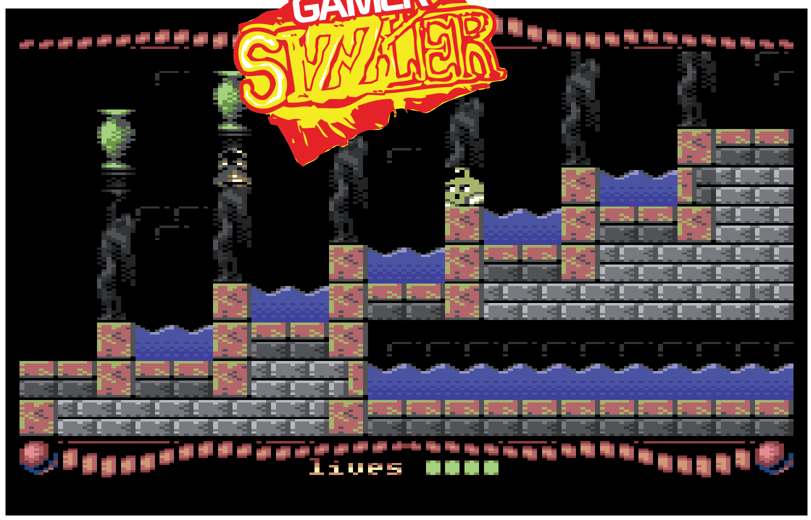
ADVENTURES IN TIME

"DID I MENTION IT ALSO TRAVELS IN TIME?"





» [Plus/4] Run, Forest, run!



» [Plus/4] Not up for a swim.

A yellow blob (we'll call him Blobert for the moment since there's no mention of another name in the introduction or anywhere else) was out for a saunter in the forest near to where he lived, and since a stroll in the local woodlands wouldn't be much of an adventure, he just has to get lost.

As Blobert wanders around, looking for a familiar landmark, he stumbles into some ancient ruins and in turn a strange machine with a purple aura around it – being a brave blob and having forgotten that he was already lost to begin with, Blobert steps inside and presses an inviting red button… at which point the time distortion machine flings him away from the present.

And so the adventures in time begin without even a sniff of a police box. Our hero is facing a trek through over 40 screens of ruins back to the time machine – and although the area was abandoned when he found it, Blobert is no longer alone. There are other entities around, like the living balls of fire, floating eyeballs and ghosts that would almost be cute if they weren't scary. The ruins themselves aren't entirely benign either, and the reservoirs dotted around the map can very easily become watery graves.

Although the Plus/4 and its brethren are colourful machines, there really aren't many games available that exercise that large palette. But *Adventures In Time*'s visuals are pretty spectacular; the coarser-than-average movement of the sprites (which was done to avoid colour clash issues, as explained in our interview with the developers on page 101) is a little rough on the eyes to begin with, but more than forgivable considering how good everything looks as a result, and even becomes helpful soon after the adventure begins for working out where safe areas are between the enemies, launching into precise jumps and nailing landings.

The music and effects are similarly inspired and, rather than relying on a SID card to strap extra capabilities to the machine (as older Plus/4 homebrews tended to do), the standard two-channel sound has been pushed extremely hard in order to produce some appropriately jolly tunes throughout. The optional atmospheric background sounds also dovetail neatly with the visuals.

Apart from a small teaser released without fanfare near the end of 2009, which subsequently managed to slip completely under our radar, nothing was said publicly by the developers about *Adventures In Time* before its release, and it really has come as a great surprise in a number of ways. Plans are already afoot to add it to the Psytronik catalogue (we've even got a screenshot of the titles page, but at the time of writing the price hasn't been announced), but we're told that, apart from some cosmetic tweaks, the downloadable version at Plus/4 World is the same game – and that game is something that any Plus/4 owner with a penchant for platforming is going to like.

92%



» [Plus/4] Walk the dinosaur… bones.



» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE PLUS/4
» **DEVELOPED BY:** KICHY AND LUCA
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/AIT
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2010
» **PRICE:** FREE DOWNLOAD (REAL MEDIA TBA)
» **REVIEWED BY:** JASON KELK

SPIKE

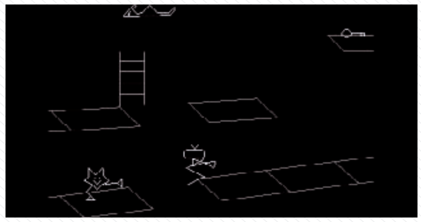
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

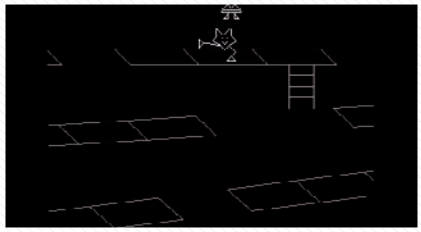
» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** TRISTAR AND RED SECTOR INC.
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SPIKE » **PRICE:** FREE

Poor Spike is currently suffering from a bout of Marioitis, a common ailment among videogame characters that sees their love interest repeatedly kidnapped, taken to another castle or perhaps locked in a suspended cage, which is what's happened to poor Molly. To recover his beloved from the clutches of his arch nemesis, Spike must manoeuvre his way around moving catwalks, grab the key and release the girl from her imprisonment – this must be done while surrounded by avian and… well, springy baddies that can either be avoided or given a good kicking.

As with TRSI's previous Vectrex conversion Fortress of Narzod (covered way back in issue 65), Spike, Molly and their antagonists are all faithfully rendered as vector graphics on the C64, but the sound has been beefed up with some excellent if unexpectedly mellow tunes. The speech – the feature that almost everybody remembers from playing the original game – is present to add a final sparkle to a fun little game.

77%





» [C64] Oh Spike!

HEART STEALER

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

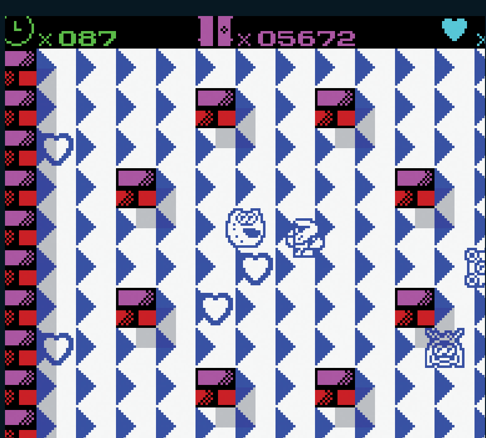
» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** TIMMY
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/HEART-STEALER » **PRICE:** FREE

Another Retro Gamer, another platform game for the Spectrum, and this one's even reminiscent of something we've looked at previously, in particular *Uwol: Quest For Money.* But although the Mojon Twins' neat platformer was an inspiration for developer Timmy, when he released it at World of Spectrum he commented that the goal in *Heart Stealer* was to complete the game with the highest possible score.

To that end, the difficulty curve is in this game is less steep, to the point where *Heart Stealer* is pretty easy to complete, even on the first couple of goes. The only way to see the game over message is to run out of time. But getting a decent score is harder, as, along with end-of-level rewards for collected hearts and remaining time, an 'awesome' bonus is dished out if a screen is cleared without collisions, so racking up the points requires an enjoyable but tricky-to-master balance of cautiousness to avoid collisions, and reckless abandon to clear stages quickly!

85%

» [Spectrum] I just made a friend.





» [Atari 8-bit] Talk to me, Harry Winston.

DIAMONDZ

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** FANDAL AND PG
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DIAMONDZ » **PRICE:** FREE



Everybody loves diamonds – they're a girl's best friend, Bond villains covet them to power their doom lasers and crosses collect them. Being a gemstone-gathering symbol presents issues, as when you start moving it's impossible to stop until you smack into a convenient wall and, of course, some joker has left the diamonds you're currently eyeing up in all sorts of awkward-to-reach and dangerous places.

Diamondz is a guaranteed hair-puller of a game and, although the authors have thankfully included a code-based level selector, it reinforces intricate puzzles within the levels themselves with strikingly strict time limits. For more patient or at least bloody-minded gamers (and those who may perhaps be 'cheating' by using an emulator with a pause option) there's a wondrous sigh of relief to be had after finishing a particularly evil level – just don't try completing *Diamondz* in a single sitting if retaining your sanity is important!

83%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Atari 8-Bit] Anybody there…?

>> Spooky ookey

While it's only an early work print at the time of writing, with just some of Sir Arthur's controls (there's no jumping or climbing) and the first level in place, an Atari 8-bit conversion of Capcom's *Ghosts 'N Goblins* based on the C64 conversion developed by Chris Butler is currently under way. We'll have to wait and see how this project pans out, but what's there is already promising.



» Ooh, what a Pong!

>> With a name like that…

It's rare that we cover games when there isn't much information on them, but along with some screenshots that hopefully prove it's more than just hyperbole, this one has the coolest name so far this year and that earns it a mention. *King Of Pong* is being simultaneously developed for the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and MSX and, as the name almost screams, it's going to be a text adventure… honest!



» [Atari 8-Bit] Eject, Mailman, eject!

>> Your nostrils are flaring

Returning to the Atari 8-bit for the last news item, there's a playable preview of a shiny new horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up called *Tomcat* doing the rounds. Graphically, it already looks interesting if a little monochromatic (but, according to the developers, they're hoping to change that before the final release), and a playable preview can be downloaded from those interweb things: **kikstart.eu/tomcat-pre**.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> A creature of the Knight

It's been quite a while in the making, but finally, after a four-year gestation period, Peter Hanratty's remake of isometric 3D legend *Knight Lore* is complete. We haven't given it a proper play just yet because it arrived just a shade too late for this issue (and, for some reason, seems to enjoy either not loading or totally crashing out our machines), but is where the download and more information can be found, and hopefully a revision that fixes those issues will be released before this is published.



» [PC] Who turned out the lights?

>> Galaga be going

Retrofit: Overload might be a strange name, but it's easy to forgive that when we're dealing with an old-school gallery shooter that owes quite a debt to Eighties coin-ops and *Galaga* in particular. As with *Knight Lore*, it arrived too late to be given a proper review, so a more in-depth look will happen in issue 79. For now, the Live Marketplace page is hiding behind this forwarder: **kikstart.eu/retrofit**

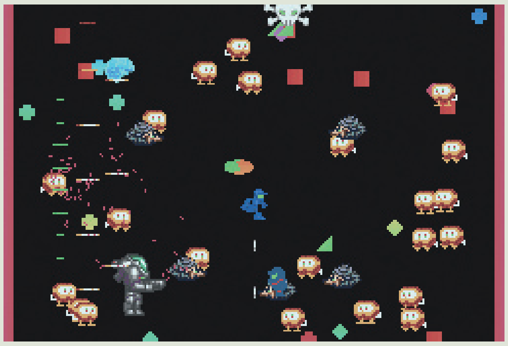
FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on *Retro Gamer*'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at *Hue Shift*.

THIS GAME IS all about colours and fast reactions; the platforms can be red, green or blue and the hue of the player's box must be changed to match a platform otherwise it won't be solid. Score is awarded for climbing high, falling out of the screen is fatal. Head to **kikstart.eu/hue-shift.**

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .



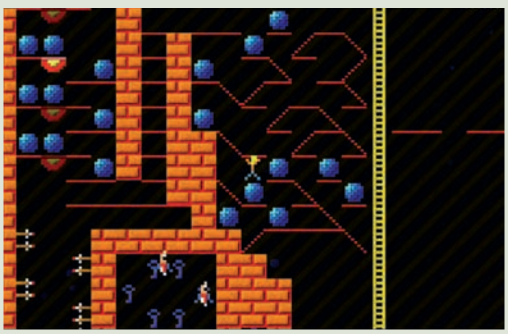
MAGNETRON

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MAGNETRON

J.K

There are a couple of 8-bit games called *Magnetron*, but this remake isn't based on either of them! Instead, it takes cues from *Robotron: 2084* while throwing in selected elements from *Llamatron* and the developer's own ideas.

The player is dumped in the middle of a menagerie of mechanical menaces with just a gun to defend themselves and the odd friendly droid to save, with a little help arriving occasionally in the form of temporary power-ups; these include shields, upgrades to the gun, extra lives and a nice arcing lightning weapon. *Magnetron* isn't a straight port of *Robotron* or indeed *Llamatron*, but has a significant amount of the same high-octane, claustrophobic action that made both titles classics.



JNKPLAT 2010

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/JNKPLAT-2010

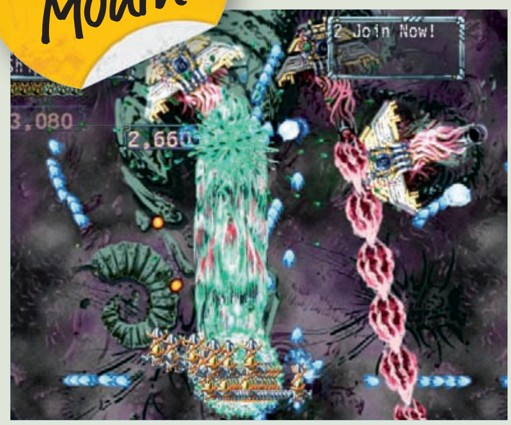
D.J

The world of *JNKPlat 2010* is highly pixelated and Platdude, a surprisingly endearing collection of coloured dots, is for some reason keen to be elsewhere; he can walk, climb ladders, jump, push or pull some objects, press plungers, hang from vines or ropes and will be doing all of the above in order to reach the swirly vortex that serves as an exit.

The tutorial stages aren't challenging once the controls have been learnt, but most of the level packs bundled with *JNKPlat 2010* are tricky little devils and Jayenkai has incorporated a level editor so that players can create their own challenges that can then be sent in. That expandability gave *Lode Runner* (the game that *JNKPlat 2010* loosely resembles) amazing amounts of longevity.



Remake of the Month



SHOOT 1UP

» **DOWNLOAD:** MOMMYSBESTGAMES.COM/SHOOT1UP.HTML

J.K

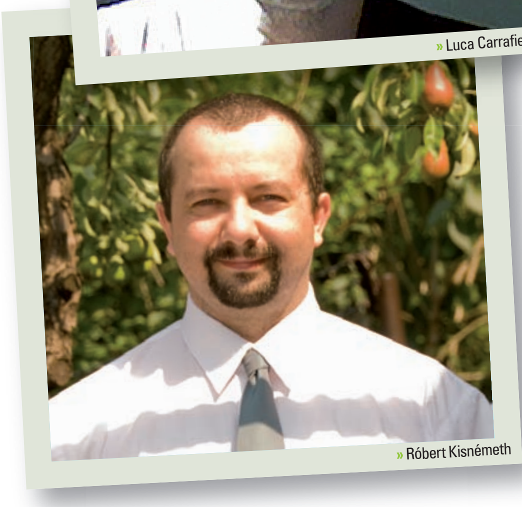
Space Command usually issue would-be heroes with a couple of spare ships but, despite the odds already being heavily stacked in the enemy's favour, insist that they're only used one at a time – until now that is, because the unique selling point of Xbox Live Indie Games blaster *Shoot 1Up* is that the player's lives wade in with all guns blazing!

Controlling an entire armada is surprisingly simple: one ship is designated as lead and controlled by the thumbstick or D-pad, while the others follow with a slight delay; holding down Ⓐ deals out electric death from every craft, but not firing has advantages too as it allows the shields to charge up, so the next stab of the fire button will deal out a lot more damage to anything within their radius and wipe out bullets. The right shoulder button will expand the formation while the left contracts it until every life is stacked into the same air space, and Ⓧ slows the lead ship down to give finer control for when things get busy.

The flexibility available in *Shoot 1Up* is remarkable; players can select from three difficulty levels (and a fourth that's easily unlocked), choose which way to go at key points during play and even dial the entire game speed up or down to suit their needs – enough to keep most players entertained for just 80 Points.



» Luca Carrafiello

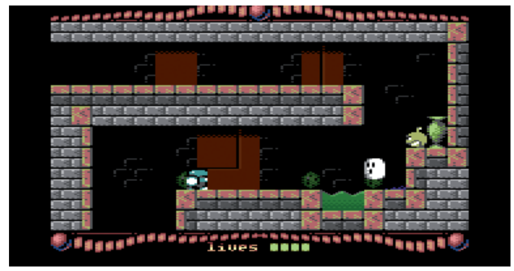


» Róbert Kisnémeth

HOMEBREW HEROES

RÓBERT KISNÉMETH AND **LUCA CARRAFIELLO** HAVE BEEN WORKING ON GAMES FOR THE COMMODORE 16 AND PLUS/4 FOR A WHILE NOW, BUT SINCE THEY'VE ALMOST FINISHED ON ADVENTURES IN TIME, WE MANAGED TO FIND A MOMENT TO HAVE A CHAT WITH THEM

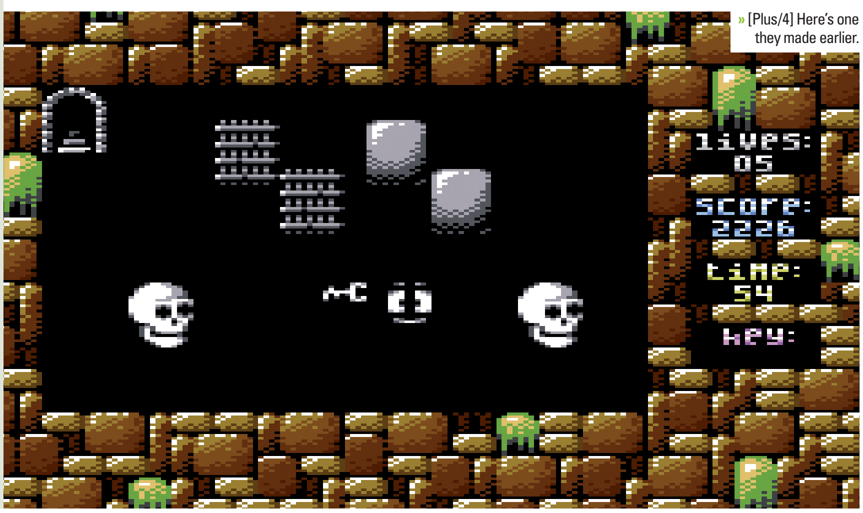




Q&A

Retro Gamer: So, what was it that got you into creating games?
Róbert Kisnémeth: I've been curious as to how games work since 1989. I wrote basic programs in a notebook with a pencil and typed it at school. I was inspired by game screenshots seen in the Sinclair User magazines I found in the local library. I wished I could create similar games one day.
Luca Carrafiello: As written on several ancient B-movie posters, 'I came from The Scene.' I've never started a game project by myself because of my mediocre coding skills. The (in)famous *XeO3* project (with Mike Dailly) has been a hard and very fruitful field to improve my style both in music composing and graphics drawing. Róbert contacted me about the *Adventures In Time* project once he saw that I'd been able to achieve some reliable animations, after which I contributed on the music side too, pushing the shrill, limited TED sound as far as I could. Idea after idea, the little undemanding game got bigger, because both of us did not hold back when there was room for add-ons or cute touches. In the end, there are no superstructures. Making retro games is pure fun.

RG: Since you've both just released *Adventures In Time*, have you made any plans for what you're doing next? Any more projects together?
RK: I'm always searching for new ideas. Currently, I'm working on two projects for Plus/4. One of them is a game I just started a few days ago. I asked Luca and we discussed the idea, we made decisions about design and I've already coded some basic prototypes.
LC: We've just prepared the commercial version of *Adventures In Time*, which will be distributed by Psytronik as its first Commodore 264 series product. Compared to the freeware release, it will have very few changes: a little, almost undetectable fix, pause/abort game options and few additional graphic elements in the very early rooms. On the other hand, just after the project's closure, it was natural for both of us to continue our partnership; we're on the new game right now, and have to say I love its cheap style! Kichy is also working on a development tool, which has been a must-have in the C16/Plus4 scener's dreams, something about music…



» [Plus/4] Here's one they made earlier.

RG: And is there any style of game that you want to try but haven't found time for so far?
RK: I'm interested in how a car racing game like *Lotus III* on Amiga can be made on the Plus/4. Another genre I like is the slow-paced isometric adventure; some years ago I had plans to remake a C16 adventure game (*Ghost Town* by Kingsoft) on PC in isometric view, but I dropped the idea.
LC: Before trying something else, my wildest desire would be to finish *XeO3* game. The game is here, and it shouldn't be too hard to add the code and features. Pickups and weapon system, big bosses, some different kind of foes we can't name at the moment… only at that time will it be my turn to add the graphics and music. Unfortunately, Mike is now taken away from *XeO3*, due to his involvement in a fresh new commercial business, which seems to steal all his time. While waiting for that, I guess mazes and shooting are next!

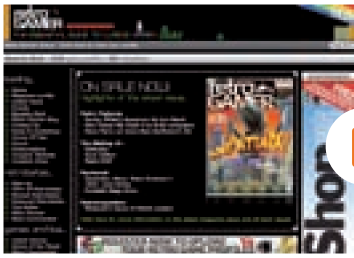
RG: Finally, what advice can you give to anybody wanting to become involved in homebrew development?
RK: First of all, your girlfriend/wife and family need a lot of patience! Learn the advantages and disadvantages of the current computer/console you work on. For example, in *Adventures In Time* I didn't implement software sprites (Plus/4 lacks hardware sprites) because it eats lots of CPU power and causes colour clashing with other background elements. Discarding software sprites meant I could use coloured graphic elements, to gain extra memory that I could use to implement other features like background graphics in ending screens, and have more space for music. If you develop for PC that doesn't mean you *have to* use that 3D card!
LC: Homebrew games are now considered as the most promising videogames field. Nowadays, the commercial games are suffering from crises, and not only because of a business slump. After the deliberate diffusion of first-person shooters (all clones of the first one – they are only different because your graphics board has been changed!), and the boring 'sim' games (a continuation of your workday – who needs that?), it's now time for the 'games-with-no-game-inside', where the real game… is you 'airbanding' with a toy guitar or moving on a damn plastic board. Homebrew games simply are the next step.

BARGAIN HUNT

DESPERATE TO FINISH OFF YOUR RETRO COLLECTION? WANT TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ALL THE BEST BARGAINS BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO? THEN VISIT WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/BARGAIN_HUNT.PHP AND DISCOVER ALL THE CLASSIC MACHINES THAT YOU'LL EVER NEED

You've been asking for it forever, but we're pleased to announce a brand new look for **Retro Gamer**'s Buyer's Guide section that makes it incredibly easy to get your hands on all the best retro bargains.

Using our new search engine couldn't be easier. All you need to do is select a manufacturer and machine from the pull-down menu. Once you've found the system you're after, the internet will search eBay for the top 20 ending items, meaning that you'll be able to gauge the market's health with very little effort. This month, we've been building our N64 collections.



Head on over to the excellent **www.retrogamer.net** and click on 'Bargain Hunt' or visit **www.retrogamer.net/bargain_hunt.php**



Put in the details for the greatest computer in the world and discuss with your staff writer why it's so much better than the ZX Spectrum.



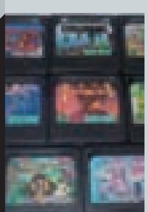
Swoon in delight as you find yourself getting ever closer to collecting all the £1.99 *Simulator* games that Codemasters ever released.

eBAY BARGAINS

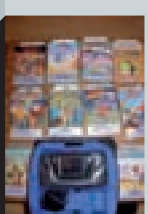
Impressed with Matt's Game Gear collection on the opposite page, Darran has been checking out the offers on eBay.



■ If you want to get into the Game Gear from the bottom, this is a good start. A case, a good-condition machine and six games. The asking price? A very decent £25.



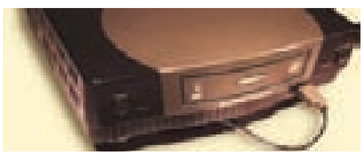
■ And if you're looking for some games to go with that then check this out. For £11 you could get eight unboxed titles, including *Lemmings*, *Castle Of Illusion* and *Wonder Boy*. Nice.



■ One of the best packs we saw featured ten boxed games – including *Sonic*, *Prince Of Persia* and *Space Harrier* – the machine and a case. It's £60, but it's all in great condition.

3DO

3DO GOLDSTAR	£45+ ($81+)
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)	£40+ ($74+)
PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)	£20+ ($37+)



ACORN

ARCHIMEDES	£30 ($55)
ATOM	£50 ($92)
ELECTRON	£10 ($18)
BBC MICRO	£15 ($28)



AMSTRAD

CPC 464	£10+ ($18+)
CPC 664	£90+ ($165+)
CPC 6128	£25+ ($46+)
GX4000	£50+ ($92+)

APPLE

APPLE II	£30+ ($55+)

ATARI

400/800/600XL/XE	£20+ ($37+)
2600 (VCS)	£20+ ($37+)
5200	£30 ($55)
7800	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR CD	£70 ($129)
LYNX I/II	£20+ ($37+)
ST	£20+ ($37+)

BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78	£75+ ($138+)
PLAYDIA	£90 ($166)
PIPPIN (ATMARK)	£500+ ($921+)
WONDERSWAN	£10 ($18)
WONDERSWAN COLOR	£20 ($37)
WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL	£25 ($46)

COMMODORE

AMIGA 500/600/1200	£20+ ($37+)
C16/PLUS/4	£15+ ($28+)
C64	£10+ ($18+)
C64 GS	£30+ ($55+)
C128	£30+ ($55+)
CDTV	£20 ($37)
CD32	£25 ($46)
VIC-20	£10+ ($18+)

FUJITSU

FUJITSU FM	£100+ ($184+)





FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY	£200+ ($368+)

MISCELLANEOUS

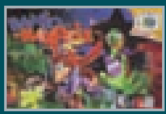
BALLY ASTROCADE	£20 ($37)
BARCODE BATTLER	£5 ($18)
CASIO LOOPY	£25 ($46)
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F	£10 ($18)
COLECOVISION	£30 ($55)
DRAGON 32/64	£8 ($15)
ARCADIA 2001	£10 ($18)
EPOCH CASSETTE VISION	£20 ($37)
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION	£30 ($55)
INTELLIVISION	£40+ ($74+)
ODYSSEY	£10 ($18)
ORIC-1	£20 ($37)
PLAYSTATION	£10 ($18)
SAM COUPÉ	£50-£200 ($92-$368)
SUPERVISION	£15 ($28)
TIGER ELEC GAME.COM	£15 ($28)
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)	£10 ($18)
VECTREX (MB/GCE)	£80 ($147)
X68000	£90+ ($166+)

MSX

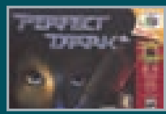
MSX 1	£10+ ($18+)
MSX 2	£20+ ($37+)
MSX 2+	£30+ ($55+)
MSX TURBO R	£30+ ($55+)

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer sifts through the pages of eBay to report back on any items of interest that have caught our eyes. This month we go Rare crazy on the N64



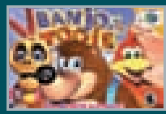
BANJO-KAZOOIE
System: **N64**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£32.89**



PERFECT DARK
System: **N64**
Normally sells for **£18**
Ended at **£6.56**



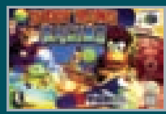
JET FORCE GEMINI
System: **N64**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£30.45**



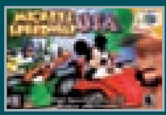
BANJO-TOOIE
System: **N64**
Normally sells for **£30**
Ended at **£45.23**



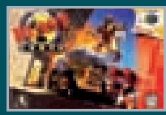
GOLDENEYE
System: **N64**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **No Sale**



DIDDY KONG RACING
System: **N64**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£3.90**



MICKEY'S SPEEDWAY USA
System: **N64**
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£38.34**



BLAST CORPS
System: **N64**
Normally sells for **£22**
Ended at **£31.01**

NEC

PC-6601	**£10+ ($18+)**
PC-8801	**£20 ($37)**
PC-9801	**£35 ($65)**
PC-FX	**£50 ($92)**
PC-ENGINE	**£55 ($101)**
PC-ENGINE GT	**£70+ ($129+)**
TURBOGRAFX-16	**£30 ($55)**
TURBO EXPRESS	**£50 ($92)**
SUPERGRAFX	**£80 ($147)**
PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBOGRAFX CD	**£50+ ($92+)**
PC-E DUO/ TURBO DUO	**£120 ($221)**
DUO-R	**£80 ($147)**

NINTENDO



FAMICOM	**£60 ($111)**
FAMICOM AV	**£40 ($74)**
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM	**£70 ($129)**
SHARP FAMICOM TWIN	**£100 ($184)**
GAME & WATCH	**£1+ ($2+)**
GAME BOY B/W	**£5 ($9)**
GAME BOY POCKET	**£8 ($15)**
GAME BOY COLOR	**£12 ($22)**
GAME BOY ADVANCE	**£25 ($46)**
N64	**£10 ($18)**
N64 DD	**£150+ ($276+)**
NES (TOASTER)	**£15 ($28)**
NES (DOG BONE)	**£50 ($92)**
SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)	**£20 ($37)**
SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)	**£50+ ($92+)**
VIRTUAL BOY	**£80 ($147)**

PHILIPS

CD-I	**£20+ ($37+)**
CD-I 450/500	**£30 ($55)**
VIDEOPAC G7000	**£10 ($18)**
VIDEOPAC G7400	**£20 ($37)**



SEGA

32X	**£35 ($65)**
DREAMCAST	**£25 ($46)**
GAME GEAR	**£15 ($28)**
SG-1000	**£50-£150 ($80-$260)**
SC-3000	**£50 ($92)**
MASTER SYSTEM I/II	**£10 ($18)**
AMSTRAD MEGA PC	**£10 ($18)**
TERADRIVE	**£100 ($184)**
MEGA DRIVE/GENESIS	**£25 ($46)**
GENESIS 3	**£35 ($65)**
NOMAD	**£100 ($184)**
MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE	**£100+ ($184+)**
MEGA-CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**
PICO	**£20 ($37)**
SATURN	**£30 ($55)**

SINCLAIR

ZX80	**£200 ($368)**
ZX81	**£70 ($129)**
ZX SPECTRUM 48K	**£10 ($18)**
ZX SPECTRUM 128K	**£40 ($74)**
ZX SPECTRUM+	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +2	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +3	**£40 ($74)**

SNK

NEO-GEO AES	**£150+ ($276+)**
NEO-GEO MVS	**£70 ($129)**
NEO-GEO CD	**£100 ($184)**
NEO-GEO CDZ	**£80+ ($147+)**
NEO-GEO POCKET	**£20 ($37)**
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR	**£35 ($65)**

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

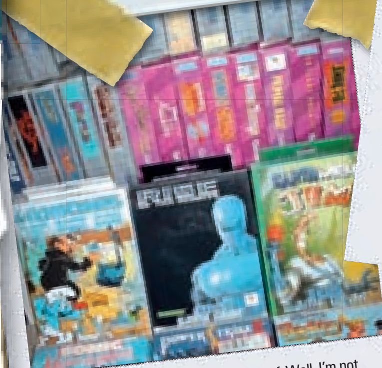
THIS MONTH WE TAKE A LOOK AT MATT GANDER'S IMPRESSIVE GAME GEAR COLLECTION



» Hello! My name is Matt and I'm a 29-year-old engineer from West Sussex. I collect Sega Game Gear stuff.



» A full set of Codemasters' releases. *Man Overboard* was the hardest to find; the sports games were the easiest. Unsurprisingly. Like Codemasters' Mega Drive and Master System games, the carts are an unusual shape.



» Boxed Euro games that I'm rather fond of. Well, I'm not that fond of *Rise Of The Robots*, but it doesn't turn up boxed very often.



» Rare-ish loose carts including *Mega Man*, *Super Return Of The Jedi*, *Wizard Pinball*, *James Pond 3*, *Baku Baku* and the deeply rubbish *Itchy & Scratchy* game.



» The blue Game Gear is a US Sega Sports edition. It has been modded with an LED backlight and the capacitors have been changed. Dying capacitors can cause all sorts of screen and sound problems. Fortunately they can be replaced using a soldering iron and a steady hand!



If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about, then contact us at **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk** and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

A GRAND DAY OUT

Word up, **Retro Gamer**!

I just wanted to tell you about the Retro Computer Museum I went to on 16 May, as it was a fantastic event. There were tons of consoles, computers, arcade cabinets, a pinball machine and even a rare Atari Jaguar VR add-on! It was a great experience that featured all kinds of gamers of many ages. There were five and six-year-olds, grandparents and plenty of others of all ages. There was a *Bomberman* tournament on the projector and almost all of the consoles and computers were playable with a whole stack of games next to them – I believe only the MSX was unplayable on the day. Anyway, it was a fantastic day and I just wanted to say a huge thank you to RCM and I'm really looking forward to their next event. Hopefully I'll see you guys there as well.

If anyone is interested, I've managed to get some footage of the event and a few interviews as well, so be sure to visit my YouTube account at **www.youtube.com/8comicbooknerd9**

Nathan Greenwood, Nottingham

It looks like you had a great time, Nathan. Sadly we were unable to attend, but we'll definitely try to make the next event. We've met the organisers at past retro events and they're lovely guys, so it will be great to catch up with them on their own turf.



» **If you went to the RCM you'd have glimpsed this very rare Atari Jaguar peripheral.**

CARTS RIGHT, DIGITAL WRONG

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I'm writing to say thank you for the excellent *Videogames Hardware Handbook* that you released several months ago now. I have been in the mood to buy an older machine for quite a while now, and while the various modern download services are all perfectly fine, I don't really like the way that some services are heading – for example, requiring you to be online in order to play *Final Fight* on PSN.

With that in mind, I decided to treat myself to an N64 and have used your guide to get hold of great games such as *Sin And Punishment*, *Bangai-O* and *Ogre Battle 64*, in addition to all the usual suspects. Having physical copies of durable carts is much more comforting from a collector's perspective!

One thing your hardware guide didn't mention was the existence of a Passport Plus adaptor that lets you play PAL/NTSC-J/NTSC-U/C games on any console provided you have a home-region boot cart to load up with. For those unable to find an NTSC N64 system, it is a cheap alternative in the meantime.

I have also decided to subscribe to your magazine, thanks to the refreshing writing style that you use. It's nice to see people write about games they love and have had time to think about, as opposed to having to decipher whether modern game reviews are publisher-approved or being written while under the influence of extreme hype.

One last question: in Australia there was a computer called the Dick Smith VZ200 that came out in the late Seventies/early Eighties. Do you know anything of this? I suspect it

STAR LETTER

GAME ROOM LOVE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

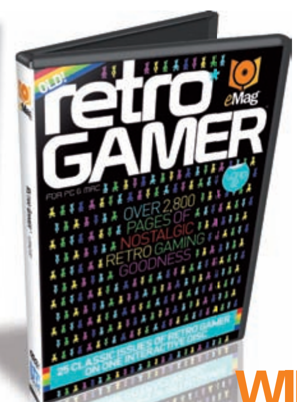
Wow! How good is Game Room? I've been following it for a while now, and while I was less than impressed with its original launch line-up, it's really starting to grow on me. Four friends and myself have recently started up a weekly competition where we all get together on Xbox Live and compete for high scores. It's fantastic fun and instantly reminds me of when we used to hang out in the arcades in Weymouth – although they're all in a very sorry state now, mostly containing fruit machines.

I'm pleasantly tickled by the way a lot of gamers are moaning about the service, saying it lacks decent games and that there are too many crusty console ports on there. While there is admittedly some truth in this, they seem to be forgetting that Game Room is about the arcade experience first and foremost. In my eyes at least, Microsoft has a winner on its hands.

Ben Cooper, via email



Glad to hear that you're enjoying Game Room, Ben. We'd be a lot happier if Microsoft could convince a few more names to come aboard, but we've still found a couple of games each week to enjoy. We also have our own weekly competition, so if you're interested, be sure to visit our Game Room forum at www.retrogamer.net/forum/viewforum.php?f=18



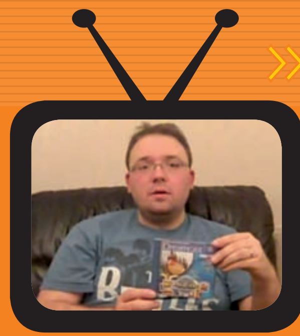
WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



YOUTUBE UPDATE

IT'S BEEN A quiet month in YouTube land as dozy Darran went and spilt tea on his laptop, rendering the keyboard completely useless. Worry not, though, as there are still plenty of great videos to sift through at **www.youtube.com/user/retrogamerdaz**



» Patrick has discovered the N64 and it's all thanks to our bookazine. Buy it now by visiting www.imagineshop.co.uk.

might possibly be an imported variant of one of the classic UK machines. It had a rubber keyboard, after all!
Patrick, via email

Glad to hear you're enjoying the *Hardware Handbook*, although you probably won't be glad to hear that Darran is currently playing *Ogre Battle 64* on the Virtual Console. While we definitely agree that there's nothing quite like having the original cart, services like the Virtual Console do allow you to get hold of rare classics for very reasonable prices.

With regards to your question about the Dick Smith VZ200, we know very little other than that it was a rebadged VTech Laser 200. Perhaps one of our readers will be able to shed more light on it.

THE NAME GAME

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I've been trying to rack my brains about an old arcade game that I used to play and its name completely escapes me. The only thing I can really remember about it is that it was a side-scrolling fighter and you were able to play as a knight. I think you could play it with a friend and I remember that you did a little victory twirl with your sword whenever you completed a level. It's been driving me around the bend trying to think what it might be and after trawling the internet for an age I've had to admit defeat. If you could put me out of my misery I'd really appreciate it.
Derek Johns, via email

Worry no longer, Derek, as we do believe that we have the answer you're looking for. The game you're describing sounds very similar to *Knights Of The Round*, a scrolling fighter from Capcom that was released in 1991. Up to three players could play at the same time, and it was loosely based on the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. It's also available on *Capcom Classics Collection Reloaded* for the PSP and *Capcom Classics Collection Vol 2* for the Xbox and PS2.

ACROSS THE SEA

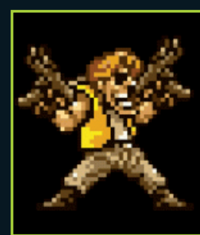
Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I love retro games and I have been searching for a publication that is devoted to them for some time. You would seem perfect – I noticed the magazine on YouTube – but you're based in the UK and I'm all the way over in the United States. Your subscription price is a little too high for me, I'm afraid, so I was hoping that you could tell me of any shops in the US that might sell **Retro Gamer**?
Landon, via email

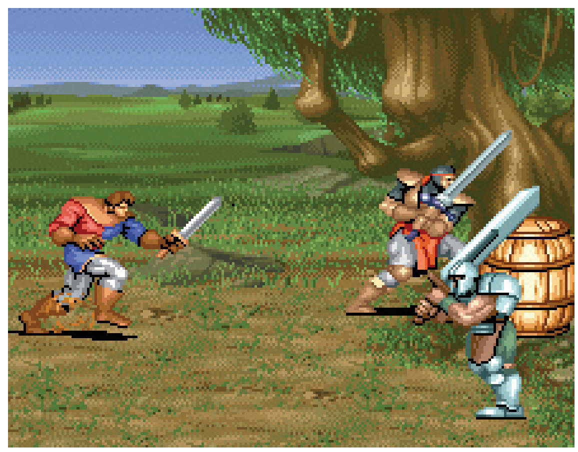
»

> "Having durable carts is more comforting from a collector's perspective!"

RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Joe Shaw
Joined:	14 May 2010
Location:	Leicester
Occupation:	Merchandiser
Website:	Not given
Fave Games System:	Famicom



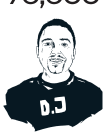
» [Arcade] Derek used to love playing Capcom's *Knights Of The Round*. We preferred *Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara* ourselves.

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



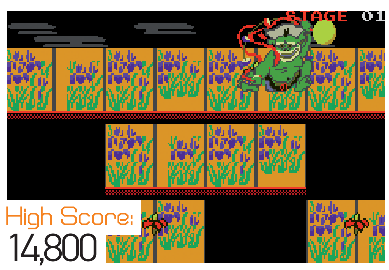
High Score: 96,600



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: TIME PILOT

Why I picked it: Because I've rediscovered it on Game Room and it's still brilliant.
Handy tip: Ignore the final boss and simply continue to shoot the smaller enemies that keep appearing.



High Score: 14,800



STUART

CHOSEN GAME: MR GOEMON

Why I picked it: As it's coming to Game Room, and I'm a fan of *Goemon*, I figured I'd get some sneaky practice in. My score is pathetic.
Handy tip: You can't be any worse than me. I found picking off enemies as you go was the best option.



High Score: 10,048



DAVID

CHOSEN GAME: CANABALT

Why I picked it: It may not be a retro game but its old-school design and simple one-tap control is all so Eighties.
Handy tip: Just keep looking ahead. Hardest part is keeping motivation.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

What's your favourite Tomb Raider moment?

Britnostalgic Easily the leaps of faith, especially in *Tomb Raider: Legend*. I've enjoyed all the *Tomb Raider* games over the years. Not sure why they get so much stick.

Bub&Bob Short skirt and knockers.

Smurph Obvious answer is the T-rex in the first game – a real 'cack your pants' moment. I think I preferred the sense of scale from some areas, though – there was a massive room about halfway through the first game where you could raise and lower the water. It was so impressive and a great puzzle too.

Fred83 Locking the butler in the fridge.

clarance Never liked *Tomb Raider*, so for me there are no favourite moments. Sorry.

mrspud Turning off the game.

paranoid marvin Walking into the room with the sphinx and wondering how the heck I was going to get on the top of it!

felgekarp Watching her drown!

skinny Those moments in the original *Tomb Raider* when you entered a new area and the camera pulled way back to show what a large space you were in. Fantastic atmospheric moments and a great way to demonstrate how alone you were in the game.

Dunjohn Finally getting *CVG*'s nude cheat to work. Fortunately, my sister already had the Spice Girls album so I didn't need to go out and buy it.

MulderWasTaken I have two: meeting Karima Adebibe and playing the first level of *Tomb Raider: Legend* at a special event. The second was playing the first four levels of *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* at a focus group. The game is really good, and playing it co-op is great also.

markopoloman *Tomb Raider*? Since when did **RG** start reviewing those sick films?

Riddler I'm just going to say what everyone else is thinking! Lara's two best friends… Her big guns, of course. It was way cool to play a sexy broad that wielded twin pistols and did cool back flips and somersaults. Even if the controls did hack me right off!

The Mask Seller The first time Lara did the graceful handstand flip thing she does when she pulls herself up off a ledge. I was a quite a way into the first game and did it by accident; thought it was a really nice touch.

IronMaidenRule The Venice level from *Tomb Raider II*. Very atmospheric for the time with a nice balance of action and puzzles!

Rinoa I love the old *Tomb Raider* games; I've many fond memories of playing them when I was younger. One of my favourite moments was seeing the T-rex from the Lost Valley level in the original game for the first time. Made my heart race! I also remember how great the atmosphere and music were in the older games.

imparks I think rather than a standout moment it was the sheer sense of scale in the first *Tomb Raider* that I hadn't seen before in a game.

Huge and beautiful locations that you could pan the camera round, vertiginous drops and lush forests, all well represented.

Quite liked the Venice level on *Tomb Raider II* also…

Didn't like any of the games that followed. The magic had gone for me.

liveinabin I loved the feeling of isolation, that you were really alone in the depths of these lost caverns. The sequels traded that atmosphere for cheap action.

RetroBob The first few seconds in *Legend* when you realise that Lara's movement is no longer tied to an invisible grid system and she is free to move anywhere!

Cafeman A more obscure but still favourite moment from *Tomb Raider II*. In the frozen mountains, Lara enters a dark cave with horrible growling sounds. Lara works her way to the bottom and finds cages; she pulls an obligatory switch. The lights come on and the cage doors open, releasing yetis! That sequence was suspenseful!

HalyconDaze00 The atmosphere in the original *Tomb Raider* is as good as anything else I have ever played. The feeling of loneliness and isolation as you make your way through the game is stunning.

harlequ1n The amazing graphics for the time and spot-on control and gameplay. At first, only *Tomb Raider* and *Super Mario 64* gave me the feeling of being in control of my characters back in the early 3D days.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

PC ENGINE DUO

rolan Hi there, I have a PAL TurboGrafx machine but want to upgrade to either a US or Japanese Duo-RX. Is it true that they can play games from all regions? Anyway, I was just wondering how much a PC-Engine Duo-RX should cost and whether it's any better than the other forms of NEC CD models that seem to be doing the rounds.

thesubcon3 Well I bought a Duo-R modded for around $200. While the CD-ROM is region-free, the HuCard reader is not.

Dam Videogameimports have an unboxed Duo-R for £130. I'd say that is not too bad. Prices fluctuate wildy on eBay when they come up, which isn't often! Last year I paid £65-ish for a loose Duo, which cost me about another £30 for the bits and pieces. Wish I'd paid a bit extra for a Duo-R now, though.

ROBOCOP GAMES

Oliver Harper I really think the arcade game was the best *RoboCop* game. Really captures the spirit of the movie and plays so well. What does everyone else think?

lostSUNDAY *RoboCop* for the NES is the one I've played the most by far. I know that game gets a lot of hate, but I like it. Great graphics too. *RoboCop 3* for the Amiga was nice too, but i remember it was choppy as hell.

Shinobi *RoboCop* arcade is superb and feels just like the film. It's easy to one-credit due to the massive energy bar and being able to trap ED-209 off-screen. One of the best film-to-game translations.

fgasking I always enjoyed the first *RoboCop* game on the C64. As well as playing pretty good, the graphics were mind-blowing from Steve Thomson throughout.

BAD SHMUPS

gmintyfresh The shoot-'em-up genre is revered by retro gamers and has such a loyal fan base. But not everything is rosy in the shmup garden; name those shooters that just don't cut it.

bonerlaw *R-Type 2* – predictable, I know! Not a bad game per se, just the difficulty level. And for those of us who are really bad at shmups, it was very painful!

Antiriad2097 *Microcosm*. All that promise of luxurious next-gen FMV for a really ropey last-gen shmup overlaid on it.

oli_lar *Raptor: Call Of The Shadows* was pretty bad – and incredibly easy!

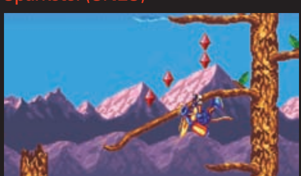
Sega2006 Blasphemy! This game is great. You have to be barmier than an Amstrad owner not to like it.

will2097 Atari Jaguar had *Trevor McFur In The Crescent Galaxy*, which was sub-optimal in many ways.

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which of Sparkster's games reigns supreme?

Sparkster (SNES)



Rocket Knight (XBLA)



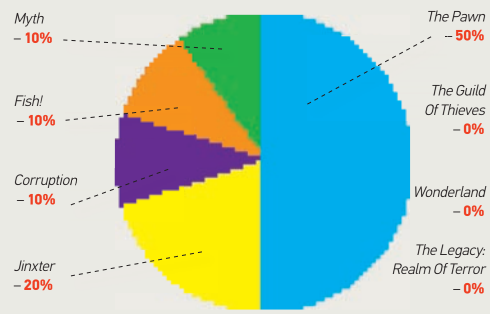
57% | 43%

GunstarHero What about *Rocket Knight Adventures* for the Mega Drive? That's the best one.

Miketendo I'm really feeling this new version. This may be my favourite of the series.

HOT TOPIC

Best Magnetic Scrolls Game



"*Jinxter* for me. I loved the humour, the setting and the lovely graphics." **– SirClive**

"*The Pawn*. Not because it's the best, but it was the first real attempt to take adventure games to 'the next level'" **– paranoid marvin**

"*Jinxter*. It was the first time Magnetic Scrolls stopped trying to ape Infocom and made something their own." **– Scapegoat**

CONTACT US

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Good news, Landon. You can buy Retro Gamer in large stores such as Borders and Barnes & Noble. We're aware of the fact that we're replying to you in a magazine that you don't read, so have also emailed you. Hope you manage to track us down.

MISSILE REQUEST

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I just wanted to say what a great magazine **Retro Gamer** is and that I've been with you right from the start.

I've recently started collecting a couple of old arcade machines and am currently keeping them in my garage. Anyway, I've been desperately searching for a *Missile Command* cabinet, as it's my favourite game, but so far I haven't been able to find one. This got me thinking and I don't ever recall reading anything about this classic game in your magazine. I'm sure all your readers would enjoy a feature on one of the greatest games from Atari's golden age, so it would be great it you could make this happen. Any chance?

Paul, Nantwich

Good luck with the *Missile Command* hunt, Paul. As for a look at the game, that could prove to be a little trickier. Darran has been in contact with *Missile Command*'s creator for a few years, but so far he's proven reluctant to do an interview. Granted, we could look back at the series itself, but it wouldn't be the same. We'll keep trying, so the best thing to do is keep reading the magazine.

TO BE THIS GOOD TAKES SEGA

Hello there, **Retro Gamer**,

It has been a good 20 years since I last wrote to a console magazine. The last time was to *S* the Sega mag with my maps of the Master System game *Cyborg Hunter* and I received a copy of *Chase HQ* for my troubles!

Anyway, the reason I'm writing to you is that I noticed that you are running a feature on the 32X and I thought you may be interested in an artefact from the official Sega magazine in May '94. At the time I was incredibly excited about the 32X and couldn't believe that you could have the arcades in the comfort of your own bedroom. How wrong I was.

My friends and I were all staunch Sega fans at the time, and when the 32X came out we all bought one. We were disappointed, to say the least. Yes, we enjoyed playing *Virtua Racing*, *Star Wars* and even a bit of *Metal Head* and *Cosmic Carnage*, but we knew we had been conned out of our money when they suddenly dropped it to concentrate on the Sega Saturn.

I just wanted to show you how we totally believed in Sega back then. Before the internet, magazines were mostly our only source of info and it hurt that they could do that to their own user base and get away with it. Many others felt let down by Sega, and when Sony's PSX appeared there wasn't any question about which console to go for. I don't feel like this any more, though, as I have grown up a bit. I still play on my Dreamcast, which reminds me: any chance in the future you could do a feature on the *Legacy Of Kain* series? I think it would be great. Keep up the awesome work on the mag, guys.

Dan, via email

Cheers for the pages, Dan. Hopefully you'll have read the article by now and should be happy with the results, as it mentions much of what you were feeling. The 32X had potential but it was squandered, turning it into a mockery of a machine that didn't do Sega any favours. What's interesting now is whether Microsoft has been paying attention, as while Natal is a world away from the 32X, console add-ons rarely have success.

> "The last time I wrote to a mag I received a copy of Chase HQ for my troubles!"

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Stuart's bargain

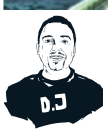
This month we all set ourselves a task of picking up a game for less than a tenner. Darran treated himself to *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* on the Wii, while Stuart and Steve both decided to get brand new copies of *Mirror's Edge* for the Xbox 360. Imagine Stu's surprise when he discovered that he'd been given the latest *Call Of Duty* instead of the FPS platformer. Needless to say, he didn't point out the mistake.



» The 32X was a massive failure on Sega's part, but at least it had arcade-perfect ports of *After Burner* and *Space Harrier*.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Monster Hunter Tri

Another month and I'm still obsessed by Capcom's game. Even my daughter reformatting my Wii and wiping out my 35-hour save hasn't put a damper on it. It just means I get to do it all over again. Hooray!





STUART

Alan Wake

I know I'm in the minority here but I'm a few episodes in and so far I'm not that impressed. The dialogue feels hammy and the gameplay is getting a little repetitive. Hopefully it'll pick up soon as I was really looking forward to this.





DAVID

Heavy Rain: The Taxidermist

If I hear Madison squeal one more time I'll scream myself, but this added extra for the PS3 adventure is keeping me playing because I still haven't got all five endings. A genius mini-game that has me excited for the DLC.

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NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 22 JULY 2010

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CENTIPEDE

Stuart Campbell stocks up on mushrooms and grabs a can of bug spray to bring you the definitive guide to Atari's hit coin-op

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

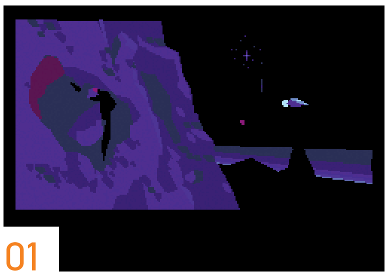
- We go behind the scenes to give you the full story of *Gorf*, one of the arcade's most innovative shoot-'em-ups
- David Crane stops by in order to discuss a career in coding that has lasted a staggering three decades
- He was once Sega's most important mascot, but was soon bumped out of favour. Find out where it all went wrong for Alex Kidd

ENDGAME



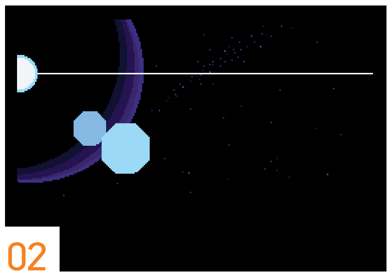
FLASHBACK

» After GBI agent Conrad Hart has his memory wiped by a conspiring evil alien race, he tries to piece back his shattered cache banks by embarking on an epic tale of conspiracy, action and morphing aliens. Flashback dazzled gamers on its release and is renowned for being one of the bestselling French games of all time. For those who didn't solve the mystery, this is how Conrad's brain-bending mission ends…



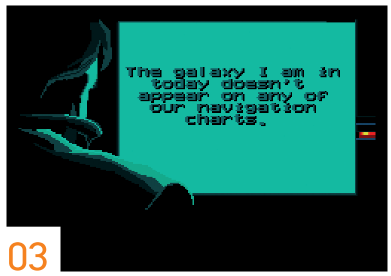
01

» After planting a charge inside the alien base, Conrad makes his excuses and leaves the base on a spaceship. He's not out of the woods just yet, though, as he needs to create some distance between his vessel and the imminent explosion.



02

» Thinking fast, Conrad punches a few random numbers into the ship's on-board computer and presses the button marked 'hyper drive'. In a flash of light, Conrad's ship is jetted a gazillion space miles away from the bomb blast. Phew.



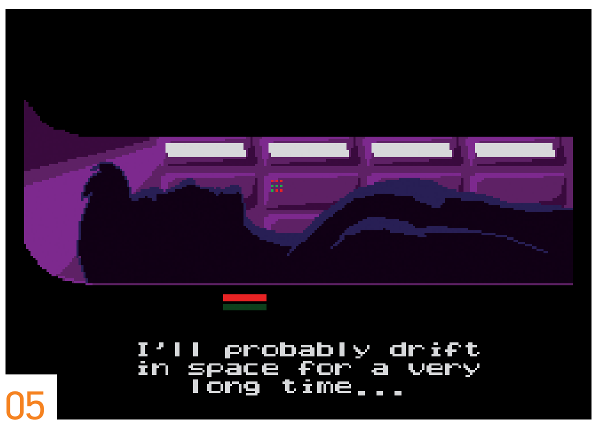
03

» Oh dear, it seems that the galaxy he's arrived in is some kind of interstellar 'no man's land', and the ship doesn't have the foggiest where 'no man's land' actually is. Seriously, are we to believe this spaceship has a hyper drive but no sat nav?



04

» No matter, we'll just click 'undo' and return from where we came. The explosion would've happened by now, so the Morphs will be no more and we'll be in familiar surroundings. Job's a good 'un, except the computer is unable to actually do that.



05

» In times like this there's only one thing to do: sleep. Yep, Conrad decides to take a nap by entering into a state of suspended animation. Unfortunately, six years later his ship drifted into the path of a shooting star and Conrad was burned to death.